







# THE RABBIS' BIBLE

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## VOLUME ONE: TORAH

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with the editorial assistance of Hannah Grad Goodman  
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*In honor of my father Eruchim Ben-Zion,  
and my mother Mere,  
who embodied the spirit of God's word  
in their daily lives.*

SHLOMO SIMON

*In honor of my parents, Jacob and Carrie Bial*

MORRISON DAVID BIAL

HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER  
EVEN AS YOU HONOR GOD,  
FOR ALL THREE HAVE BEEN PARTNERS  
IN YOUR CREATION

ZOHAR III 93a

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# PREFACE

THE BIBLE is a world in itself and this edition of the Pentateuch is intended as a textbook companion and guide to it, a book for the young and adult study group. An abridged version of the Humash is arranged as a continuous text across the tops of the pages with a continuing keyed commentary at the bottoms. That commentary explores the vast literature of Biblical interpretation including the two Talmuds, the Midrashim, the medieval and modern Jewish commentators, as well as legend and folklore. Together the Biblical text and commentary weave three thousand years of Jewish wisdom and tradition into a single strand, each reinforcing and interpreting the other.

The Bible never tells a story for its own sake nor quotes a piece of poetry for its poetic beauty alone; each verse was meant to teach a lesson, point a moral, record an important folk memory or event in the history of the Jewish people. With that in mind, we have included law, history, ritual, and ceremony—everything of value in ethical precept. The text avoids archaism but does no violence to the Biblical context by undue colloquialism.

A Teacher's Resource book has been prepared to make the study of Bible a still more meaningful experience by presenting the more profound meanings and subtle philosophies embodied in what is often a hyperbolic and symbolic Scriptural text. And rather than

apologetics, what is offered is interpretation rich in ancient lore and replete with modern scholarship, so that throughout, the student, the teacher and the reader will find new insight and understanding of the relevance in the Torah:

*Turn it, turn it again and again, for everything is in it.  
Contemplate it, grow gray and old over it, for there is no greater good.*

PIRKÉ AVOT 5:25

#### NOTE

Biblical and place names are spelled as in the Jewish Publication Society (1917) translation. Otherwise the modern Sephardic pronunciation is used for Hebrew transliteration.

Occasionally verses have been rearranged slightly to provide for an even flow of the narrative. So too, the legal sections have been selected from the various chapters of a single book and rearranged. The Rabbis held: “*Én mukdam u-m’uḥar ba-Torah*—There is no early or late in the Torah.”

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## 1. GENESIS [1-3]

### GOD CREATES THE WORLD

IN THE BEGINNING, [1] God created [2] the heaven and the earth. [3] Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the surface of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light!" [4] And there was light.

And God saw that the light was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

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[1] IN THE BEGINNING: Our Rabbis said: When a king builds a palace, he consults an architect's plans.

When God created the universe, He, too, worked from a plan—the Torah. Before the heaven and earth were formed, the Torah existed, written in black fire on white fire. God looked into the Torah and created the world.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.

And God said, "Let there be a space in the midst of the waters, dividing them." And it was so.

And God called the open space Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

Then God said, "Let the waters beneath the heaven be gathered into one place, that the dry land may appear." And it was so.

And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathered waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let the earth put forth grass, seed-bearing plants, and many kinds of fruit trees."

And it was so. The earth brought forth grass, plants that yield seed, and trees [5] bearing fruit in which was seed; and God saw that it was good.

🔪 [2] THE PLAN OF CREATION: Why did God say of this world that "it was good"? Because it was not the first that had been created. He had made others, but they had not pleased Him.

Why not? Because they had been made without the Torah—in other words, without plan and order. Furthermore, their creatures were not able to choose between good and evil, to rise or to fall. Our world, however, is based on the Torah, which gives it plan and purpose. Moreover, it allows man freedom of choice: he can decide whether or not he will obey God's laws. God's hope is that man will rise to the greatness for which he was created.

🔪 [3] JUSTICE VERSUS MERCY: The world could not exist if God had created it only in accordance with strict law and justice. At man's first transgression, the world would have had to be destroyed, either by fire or by water. On the other hand, if God ruled by compassion alone, the world would be filled with evil and wickedness, as in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. Therefore, God joined mercy with justice, and with both He ruled the world.

To what may this be compared? To a king who possessed precious goblets of glass. If he poured hot water into them, they would shatter; cold water, they would crack. When he mixed the two, the goblets could hold the water. In the same way, God combined justice with mercy, that man might endure.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.



And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the heaven to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. And let them give light upon the earth." And it was so.

And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars. And God set them in the heaven to give light upon the earth; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

🔗 [4] LET THERE BE LIGHT: First, light was created; then the world. Compare this, said our Sages, to the situation of a king who wished to build a palace while it was yet dark, and lit lanterns to work by.

But what was the source of the light which existed although there was neither sun nor moon? Rabbi Sh'muel explains: "God wrapped Himself in a white garment of holiness, and its radiance shone from one end of the world to the other."

Rabbi Eleazar, however, said, "The light on the first day was not like that of the sun, the moon and the stars which were created on the fourth day, but was so brilliant that man would have been able to see from one end of the world to the other." Why did God take this light away? "Because He foresaw the sinful generation of the deluge, and the rebellious people of the tower of Babel." When will the light be restored? "In the end of days, when all the world will be just and righteous and man will use the gift for good."

🔗 [5] THE TREES AND THE AXE: On the third day were created the grass, and herbs, and the mighty cedars of Lebanon, and other great trees. The trees rose high into the air, and stood tall and proud.

And God created iron the same day. At this the trees began to tremble. "Woe to us," they wept. "The time will come when we shall be felled by axes made of iron."

God replied, "If you will live together in peace, and if there will be no traitor among you, disaster will not befall you; for without wood for axe-handles, the iron will not be able to harm you."

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרוֹת הַגְּדֹלִים: אֶת הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדוֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם  
וְאֶת הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים.

Then God said, "Let the waters be filled with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open space of the sky." And God created the great sea-beasts, and every crawling creature, so that the waters swarmed, and various kinds of winged birds; and God saw that it was good.

And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase

on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

Now God said, "Let the earth bring forth the many kinds of living creatures, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast." And it was so.

And God made the various kinds of beast, and the cattle, and every creeping thing upon the earth; and God saw that it was good.

And God said, "I will make man [6]

🔥 [6] MAN CREATED LAST: Why was man created last of all the creatures? Several explanations are given by our Sages.

For one, let man beware, lest he become arrogant and haughty; for it can be said of him, "The gnat, the fly and even the mosquito are older than you."

Again, man was created last that everything might be ready for him. God was as a host who set a table with every delicacy and then welcomed the guest to his place.

Third, man was created on Friday afternoon that he might immediately greet Sabbath, the Queen.

🔥 [7] WHY WAS MAN CREATED SINGLY? Why did God create only one man? So that no one can boast, "I am of nobler lineage," our Sages explain. All mankind is descended from the same man. All are equal before God.

Hence, the families of nations cannot quarrel, saying, "We are greater than other peoples." Rather, as the prophet Malachi put it, "Have we not all one Father?" (2:10).

Because mankind descended from one man, the Rabbis make the point that he who destroys one life is as though he had slain an entire creation, whereas he who saves one life is as if he had saved all mankind.

כָּל הַמֵּאֲבֵד נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת כְּאֵלּוּ אֶבֶד עוֹלָם מְלֵא, וְכָל הַמְּקַיֵּם נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת כְּאֵלּוּ קַיֵּם עוֹלָם מְלֵא.

in My image, and in My likeness. Let him rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds in the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every thing that creeps upon the earth." And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him. [7] And God saw that everything He had made was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The heaven and earth were finished, and all the host within them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day. [8] And God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy; be-

cause on it He rested from all His work of creation which He had made.

This is the story of the heaven and of the earth when they were created.

#### THE PLANTING OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN

WHEN THE LORD GOD formed man from the dust of the earth, [9] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man became a living being. [10] Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden to the East, and there He put the man whom He had formed. Out of the earth the Lord God made every sort of tree to grow, pleasant to the sight, and good

🕉 [8] GOD ENDED HIS WORK: The Rabbis asked, "If God rested on the seventh day, how is it that He ended His work on it?"

To this they replied, "He created rest on the Sabbath, which is not merely the absence of work. Through rest man refreshes his spirit and renews his sense of life. The Sabbath, therefore, is a time for joy and reflection, for repose and tranquillity."

🕉 [9] MAN WAS CREATED OF DUST: Our Sages said, "God formed Adam of dust from *all over* the world: yellow clay and white sand, black loam and red soil, that the earth may not declare to any race or color of man that he does not belong here; that this soil is not his home."

🕉 [10] THE ONE ADAM: Since there was only one Adam, one might expect all men to be alike, yet this is not so. A human being stamps many coins and all are the same; but God in His glory and greatness stamps each man with the stamp of Adam, yet not one is like another.

וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם. וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי.



for food. The Tree of Life was in the midst of the Garden, and also the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil.

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to tend it and to look after it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "Of every tree in the Garden you are free to eat, but from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil [11] you shall not eat; for on the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

#### THE CREATION OF THE WOMAN

THE LORD GOD brought to the man every beast of the field, and every bird of the air, to see what he would call them.

And whatever he would call each living creature, that was to be its name.

And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast; but for Adam himself no helper was found who was like him. And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper for him."

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man; and when he slept, He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, He fashioned into a woman, and brought her to the man. [12] And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called

❧ [11] THE TREE OF LIFE AND THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE: The Bible speaks of two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. Why are they mentioned together?

The Tree of Life was tall, and shaded the entire Garden. The Tree of Knowledge, though shorter, surrounded the other. No one could touch the Tree of Life until he had penetrated the Tree of Knowledge.

❧ [12] GOD BRINGS EVE TO ADAM: There is a Midrash that God Himself sanctified the union of Adam and Eve, for the lifelong relationship between a man and a woman is sacred to Him. He Himself took Eve by the hand and brought her to Adam. He said to the angels, "Come, let us prepare the wedding ceremony."

The angels surrounded the canopy, and God pronounced the blessing upon the bridal couple. The angels played upon musical instruments and danced to entertain the bride and groom.

וַיֹּאמֶר יי אֱלֹהִים: לֹא טוֹב הָיִית הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ, אֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ עֶזְרָא כְּנֶגְדּוֹ.

Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

And God blessed them, and He said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and master it; and rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing."

And they both were naked, the man and his wife, and felt no shame.

#### THE SERPENT

NOW THE SERPENT was the most cunning of all the creatures that the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God said that you shall not eat from any tree in the Garden?"

And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the Garden we may eat; only of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the Garden God has said: You shall not eat of it, nor touch it, lest you die."

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely would not die; for God knows that on the day you eat of it, your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like God and know good from evil."

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, she took of its fruit, and ate. [13] She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves coverings.

Toward the cool of the day, they heard the voice of the Lord God in the Garden. And Adam and Eve hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees.

#### THE PUNISHMENT FOR THE FIRST SIN

THE LORD GOD called to the man, "Where are you?"

🌀 [13] THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE: How was it that Eve broke God's command so soon? To keep her from temptation, Adam had told her that God forbade them even to touch the Tree of Knowledge. In adding to God's words, Adam brought trouble upon them.

Of all the creatures, the serpent was the superior. He stood upright on two feet, and his height equaled the camel's. As king of the animals, he was jealous of Adam. Carefully, he planned the conversation that was to bring about the downfall of man. "Is it true,

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים: פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּכְבִּשְׁוּהָ וּרְדּוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם  
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל הָאָרֶץ.

And he replied, "I heard Thy voice in the Garden, and because I was naked I hid myself."

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I forbade you to eat?" And the man said, "The woman whom Thou gavest me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Cursed shall you be among all the beasts of the field; upon your belly shall you go. And there shall be hatred between you and the woman, and between your children and her children."

To the woman He said, "In pain shall you bring forth children; and your husband shall rule over you."

And to Adam God said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree from which I forbade you to eat, cursed be the earth because of you. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you. By the sweat of your brow you shall earn your living, until you return to the ground, for dust you are and unto dust you shall return."

And the man called his wife's name Eve [Life], because she was the mother of all living.

And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

So the Lord God expelled man from the Garden of Eden. He drove the man out, and He placed the cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden with flaming, whirling sword, to bar the way to the Tree of Life.

Eve," he began, "that Adam has said you may eat of every tree in the Garden?"

"We may not so much as touch the Tree of Knowledge," Eve replied, "lest we be stricken."

At this, the serpent pushed her against the Tree. "You see," he said, "nothing has happened! Neither will you die if you eat of the fruit. God Himself ate from this Tree before He created the world. If you eat from it, you, too, will be able to create worlds."

"My master, Adam, did not speak the truth," Eve thought to herself. Thereupon she succumbed to the serpent and ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

בְּזֵעַת אֶפְיָהּ תֹאכֹל לֶחֶם עֵד שׁוֹבֵךְ אֶל הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לִקְחָתָּ, כִּי עָפָר אַתָּה וְאֶל עָפָר תָּשׁוּב.





## 2. GENESIS [4-11]

### CAIN AND ABEL

AND EVE GAVE birth to Cain; and she later gave birth to his brother Abel.

Abel was a shepherd, and Cain was a tiller of the soil. And in the course of time, Cain brought from the fruit of the earth an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering to the Lord from the choicest of the first-born of his flock.

The Lord took notice of Abel and

his offering, but of Cain and his offering He took no notice. And Cain became very angry, and his face fell.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why is your face fallen? If you do right, you shall be happy, but if you do not do right, sin lies in wait at the door."

And it came to pass when Cain and Abel were in the field, that Cain turned on his brother Abel and slew him. [1]

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[1] CAIN AND ABEL: The slaying of Abel by Cain was not entirely unforewarned. As youths the two brothers had often quarreled. To

וַיְהִי הֶבֶל רוֹעֶה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And Cain answered, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" [2]

And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the earth. [3] The earth has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the soil, it shall never again

give you its full strength. A fugitive and a wanderer shall you be on the earth."

And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

And the Lord said to him, "Therefore anyone who kills Cain shall suffer vengeance sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should kill him.

keep them apart, Adam, their father, gave them different occupations. Cain, the elder, became a farmer; Abel, a shepherd.

Real strife broke out when the brothers offered sacrifices to God. Abel selected the best of his flocks, but Cain offered that which was left from his own meal. God did not accept this halfhearted service.

Cain considered himself wronged, and the brothers quarreled. "Let us separate, and divide our possessions between us," Cain suggested. Abel agreed.

"You will take the cattle and sheep," Cain continued, "and I shall take the land." Abel accepted this, too.

However, when Abel took his herd to pasture the next morning, he was confronted by Cain, who demanded, "Get off my land! The earth is mine!"

"Your garment is wool," Abel countered. "Take it off! It is mine!" And the brothers came to blows again.

Abel fled, but Cain pursued and overtook him. The struggle began anew, but Abel overpowered his brother and threw him to the ground. The terrified Cain now began to plead, "Are we not brothers? If you kill me, what will you say to our father?"

Abel responded to his brother's pleading and released him. But as Abel walked away, Cain rose, seized a stone and hurled it at Abel and slew him.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל קַיִן: אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ? וַיֹּאמֶר: לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, הֲשׁוּמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי?

THE GENERATIONS FROM ADAM  
TO NOAH

WHEN GOD CREATED man, in the like-  
ness of God made He him. Male and  
female created He them, and blessed  
them. These are Adam's descendants:

Adam was the father of Seth;  
Seth fathered Enosh;  
Enosh fathered Kenan;  
Kenan fathered Mahalalel;  
Mahalalel fathered Jared;  
Jared fathered Enoch;  
Enoch fathered Methuselah;  
Methuselah fathered Lamech;  
And Lamech had a son, and called  
him Noah;

And Noah lived to be five hundred  
years old; and he was the father of  
Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

THE STORY OF THE FLOOD

THE EARTH WAS filled with corruption  
and violence. And the Lord saw that  
the wickedness of the man on the  
earth was great. And the Lord regretted  
that He had made man on the earth,  
and it grieved Him deeply. Therefore  
the Lord said, "I will blot out mankind  
that I have created from the face of  
the earth; both man and beast, and  
creeping thing and birds of the air, for  
I regret that I have made them."

🔗 [2] AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER? "Am I responsible?" was Cain's challenge to God. "If two gladiators fight before a king and one is killed, is not the king to blame that he did not stop the contest? Are not You at fault, O God, because You did not command me to halt?"  
"I made you in My image," God replied, "with a brain and a soul. Were I to direct your every act, you would be no more than a puppet. You have a will of your own, and are responsible for your actions."

🔗 [3] THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD: This brief line raises two questions: Does blood have a voice? And, why does the Hebrew use the plural, *d'mé*, "bloods"?  
When Abel was slain, the Rabbis explained, all the children who would have been born to him, and their children, and theirs after them to the end of time, came and wept before the Lord because they would not know life.

בְּיוֹם בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם, בְּדַמּוֹת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אוֹתוֹ, זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָאם, וַיְבָרֶךְ  
אוֹתָם.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord, because Noah was righteous and wholehearted. [4] Noah walked with God.

And God said to Noah, [5] "The end of all living things is come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and I will destroy them

from the earth. [6] Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make the ark with rooms, and cover it with pitch inside and out.

"I will bring a flood upon the earth, to destroy every creature with the breath of life in it; everything on the earth shall perish. But I will make My cove-

🕊 [4] NOAH WAS A GOOD AND JUST MAN: We know that Abraham was a righteous man, but long before he lived, Noah too was said to be righteous and good. "How did one recognize the just and good man," the Rabbis asked, "in the days before the Torah and its commandments had been given to Moses? What is required of the non-Jew?"

We are told that the sons of Noah received seven commandments which, if obeyed, would earn them God's love. The commandments forbade idolatry, murder, theft, unchastity, severe cruelty to animals, or profaning the Name of God; and required that they settle disputes by law, not by force.

🕊 [5] NOAH, THE INVENTOR: According to legend, Noah was a benefactor to mankind because he introduced the plow, the hoe, the scythe and the sickle. Until his time, man had to tend the land with his bare hands. Since the soil was not properly prepared, no one could be sure what would grow. If he sowed wheat, oats might sprout, because the wheat seeds had been planted so shallowly that the wind often blew them away and brought seeds of oats or rye or weeds. The sprouts might be choked by weeds; crops could not be harvested properly.

After Noah taught mankind the use of tools, the earth could be plowed to the proper depth; plants were hoed, grew abundantly and were easily harvested. The yield increased a hundredfold; the world prospered, and there was food for the generations of men.

וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יי'. נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדוֹרוֹתָיו, אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלָּךְ  
נֹחַ.

nant with you; and you shall go into the ark, you, and your sons, and your wife, and your sons' wives.

"Of all living creatures, two of every kind you shall bring in the ark, to keep them alive. They shall be male and female of each kind, of the bird, of the cattle, and of every creeping thing on the ground, two of every kind shall come with you, to keep them alive. Take

also with you some of every kind of food that is eaten, and store it for food for you, and for them." And Noah did just as God had commanded him.

Noah, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.

Then were all the fountains of the great deep released and the floodgates of heaven were opened. And it rained

🌀 [6] I WILL DESTROY THEM: Instead of being grateful for their prosperity, men became arrogant and rebellious. God patiently overlooked transgression and idolatry, but when men robbed the poor, the orphan and the widow, corrupted justice and shed innocent blood, God determined to punish them.

Because Noah was righteous, God told him of His distress at man's iniquity; nonetheless, He did not destroy the evildoers without warning, for God is merciful and long-suffering, slow to anger and abundant in goodness. He instructed Noah, "Make an ark of gopher wood, but do not hasten as you build it; perchance the people will repent and be saved."

Noah began by planting trees for the wood. "Why are you planting trees?" the people asked curiously.

"God has commanded me to build an ark," Noah replied, "for He will bring a flood upon the earth to destroy every living thing." The others laughed at him.

Year after year, Noah tended the trees, and the onlookers continued to ask, "Why do you do this labor?" Noah's answer was always the same: "God will bring a flood because men are wicked."

Season followed season for one-hundred and twenty-five years, and still the people jeered and laughed at Noah. When God saw that they did not repent, the flood began.

וּמִכָּל הַחַי, מִכָּל בֶּשֶׂר, שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל תְּבִיאָה אֶל הַתֵּבָה לְהַחְיֹת אֹתָהּ, זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה יְהִיו.

forty days and forty nights. The flood continued for forty days on the earth. And the waters rose, and the ark floated upon the face of the waters. And the waters increased higher and higher, and all the high mountains were covered.

Every creature that moved upon the earth perished, bird, and cattle, and beast, and every swarming thing, and every man; everything in whose nostrils was the breath of life, died. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.

And God remembered Noah, and all that were with him in the ark. And God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters calmed; the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of heaven were closed, and the rain from heaven was stopped. And the waters became less and less upon the earth.

And at the end of forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark, and sent forth a raven. It went flying back and forth until the waters were dried up. Then he sent forth a dove to see if the waters had ceased

from the land. But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him. And Noah put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark.

He waited another seven days, and again he sent the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him at evening; and there in her beak was a freshly-plucked olive leaf; [7] so Noah knew that the waters had subsided.

And he waited another seven days, and he sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him again.

It came to pass in the first month, on the first day of the month, Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and saw that the surface of the earth was dry.

And God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives. Bring out with you every living thing."

So Noah came out, and with him his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives; and every creature.

And Noah built an altar to the Lord,

🕊 [7] WHY AN OLIVE LEAF? When the dove returned to the ark, she held an olive leaf in her beak. "Why the leaf of an olive tree?" our Sages pondered.

They answered, "Because the dove said: rather food which is provided by God, though it be bitter, than that of man, be it sweet as honey."

יְהִיוּ מִזֹּנוֹתֵי מְרוֹרִים כְּזֵית זֶה וּמִסּוּרִים בִּידֶךָ, וְאַל יְהִיוּ מִתּוֹקִים כְּדָבֶשׁ  
וּמִסּוּרִים בִּיד בֶּשֶׂר וָדָם.

and made an offering on the altar. And the Lord said to Himself, "I will never again curse the earth because of man's evil. Neither will I again destroy every thing living, as I have done.

"As long as the earth exists,  
Seedtime and harvest,  
Cold and heat,  
Summer and winter,  
Day and night,  
Shall not cease."

#### THE RAINBOW

AND GOD SPOKE to Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, "I now establish My covenant with you, and with your children after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast with you; with all that came out of the ark. And I will establish My covenant that never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature

that is with you, to endless generations: I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth."

And the sons of Noah that went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. And sons were born to them after the flood, and from them the whole earth was populated.

#### THE TOWER OF BABEL

NOW THE WHOLE earth had one language and the same words. And it came to pass, when they migrated from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there.

And they said to one another, "Let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly."

And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in heaven. [8] Thus we will make a name for ourselves, so that we may not be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

And the Lord saw the city and the

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☞ [8] THE TOWER OF BABEL: "Let us build a city," said King Nimrod, "and a tower so high that it will reach the heaven. We shall inscribe our names on its bricks and be remembered forever."

Thus Nimrod rebelled against God, the Rabbis pointed out. Men were so prosperous that they no longer put their trust in Him. Some said, "Why did God choose to dwell in heaven, while to us is given

עוֹד כָּל יְמֵי הָאָרֶץ, זֶרַע וְקָצִיר וְקָר וְחֹם וְקִיץ וְחֹרֶף יוֹם וְלַיְלָה לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ.



tower which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, "They are one people, and they all have one language; yet this is what they begin to do. Now nothing which they decide to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and make a babble of their

language that they will not understand one another's speech." [9]

So the Lord scattered them over the face of all the earth; and they had to cease building the city. That is why its name was Babel: because there the Lord made a babble of their language.

the earth? We will mount to heaven, dethrone Him, and dwell there."

Others cried, "Let us put our idols in heaven in His place."

"Let us go up to heaven," shouted another, "and war on Him with our bows and arrows!"

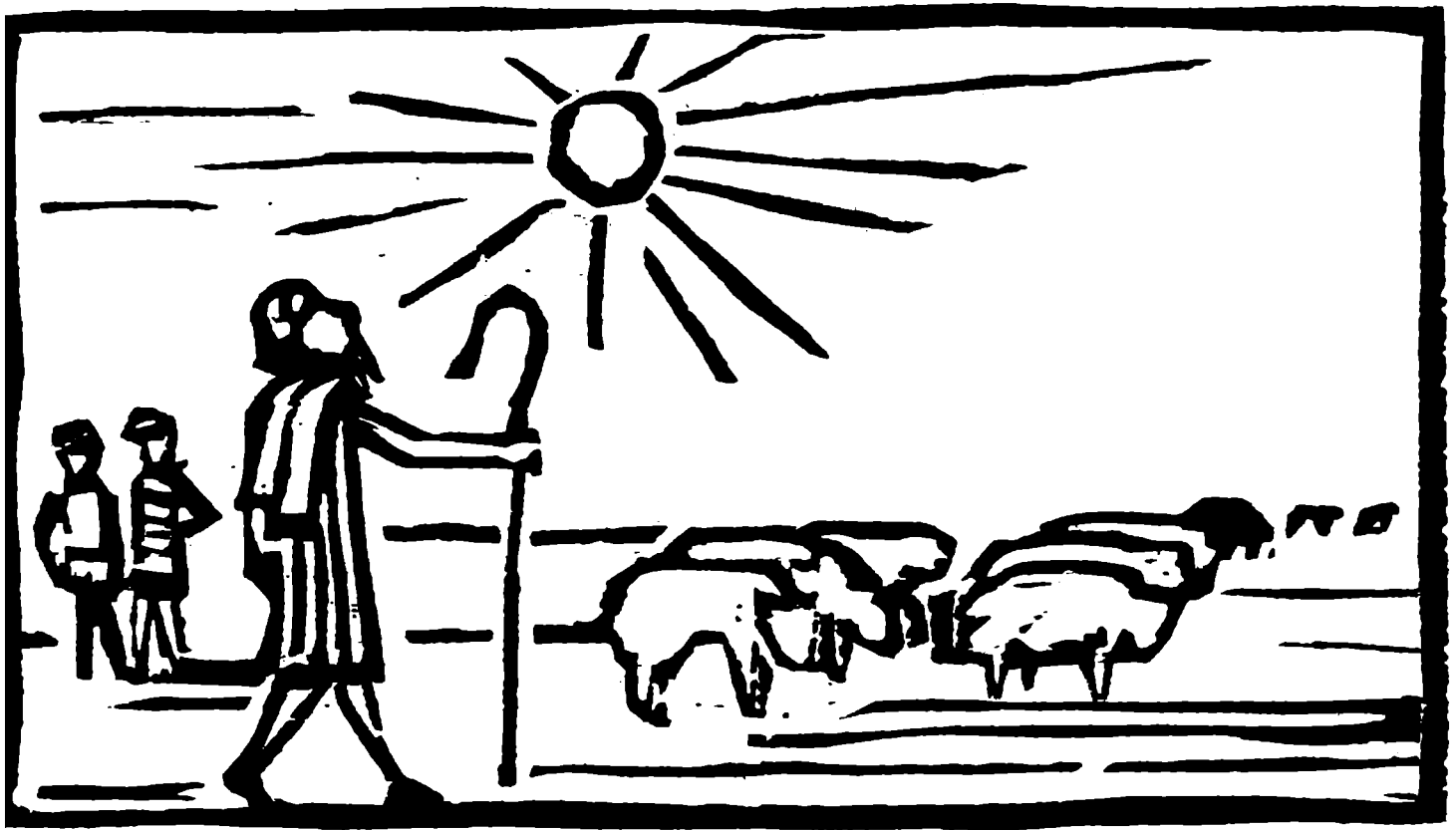
They decided to erect a tower that would reach the skies. Nimrod assembled six hundred thousand workers for the task.

The tower was built with great cunning. On the east side were steps by which to ascend; on the west, steps to go down. The structure grew to such a height that it took a year to reach the top, and a brick became more precious to the builders than a human being. If a man fell to his death, no one mourned; but if a brick dropped, the workmen wailed and tore their hair, because it would take a year to replace it.

Men lived on the tower all their lives. They married, bred children and reared them without setting foot on ground. Because Nimrod was more concerned with the tower than with those who built it, he sent up bricks rather than food; only when the men refused to work did he send up food enough, so that the tower would be finished.

✎ [9] THEY COULD NOT UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER: God saw the tower, and became angry. He confounded the language of the builders so that they could not understand one another. If one asked for mortar, the other might hand him a brick, which the first, in his anger, would throw at his partner. As a result, the work stopped and the builders were scattered.

עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בָּבֶל, כִּי שָׁם בָּלְלָהּ יְיָ שִׁפְתֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ.



### 3. GENESIS [11-16]

#### FROM SHEM TO ABRAHAM

THESE ARE THE descendants of Shem, ancestor of all the children of Eber [the Hebrews].

Shem's son was Arpachshad;  
Arpachshad's son was Shelah;  
Shelah's son was Eber;

Eber's son was Peleg;  
Peleg's son was Reu;  
Reu's son was Serug;  
Serug's son was Nahor;  
Nahor's son was Terah;  
Terah's sons were Abram, [1] Nahor,  
and Haran;  
Haran was the father of Lot.

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[1] THE BIRTH OF ABRAM: One evening as King Nimrod walked in his garden, a brilliant star appeared in the sky. Nimrod watched as it swung across the heavens, growing larger and larger until it seemed to swallow the four brightest stars. Then it plunged downward, to hover over a nearby house.

Nimrod summoned the royal astrologers and pointed out the star,

תֵּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת אַבְרָם, אֶת נַחֲוֹר וְאֶת הָרָן.

Haran died during the lifetime of his father Terah. And Abram and Nahor

each married: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's

gleaming steadily over a house beyond the park. As they all stared, the star lifted itself high, and disappeared into the heavens. "What does this portend?" Nimrod asked.

In the morning the wizards returned with their answer. "The star stood above the house of Terah, a maker of idols," they said. "Last night a son was born to Terah's wife. This boy will become so great that his fame will outshine that of the four greatest kings of our age."

Nimrod determined that the boy would not live. He sent for Terah, and said, "I want the boy who has been born to you. I will give you one hundred pieces of gold for him." Terah paled, for Nimrod's every word was law.

"Before I answer, O king, may I tell you what befell me yesterday?" Terah asked. "A man of wealth came to me and offered me a stable filled with oats and hay in return for my only horse. O king, shall I sell my horse for this great price?"

"Stupid man, of what use is fodder without a horse?" replied the king.

Terah bowed his head. "Of what value to me is all the gold in the world, if I have no son?"

In rage, Nimrod cried, "Sell me your son or both of you shall die!" Terah left in fear and trembling.

Terah's wife wept bitterly when she heard the story. It so chanced, however, that the infant son of a slave died in the night. Terah took its body to the palace, and Nimrod was satisfied that Abram, Terah's newborn son, was dead.

[1] ABRAM SEEKS GOD: Terah hid Abram in a cave high on a mountain. There the lad grew up alone, with none to teach or guide him. Yet he learned for himself the greatest truth of existence—of God who rules the world.

One night the boy had gazed up at the stars, and marveled, "How

שֵׁם אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָם שָׂרִי.

wife was Milcah. And Sarai was barren;  
she had no child. And Terah took his

son Abram, his grandson Lot, and his  
daughter-in-law Sarai, and set out with

beautiful are the moon and stars! They must be gods." He bowed low before them, and worshiped.

The night passed, and the sun rose. "The warmth and light of the sun," Abram observed, "have driven away the moon and the stars. Surely the sun is god over all!" He bowed low to the sun.

Clouds came and hid the light of the sun; then a wind drove the clouds before it. Abram realized that all these were but part of the world and its wonders. "There must be a ruler over all the world," he pondered, "over the sun, the moon and the constellations, over all the creatures of the earth. I shall worship only the Creator and Ruler of the universe."

Abram bowed before the unseen God, and spoke a prayer in his heart. Suddenly a voice answered, saying, "Here am I, My son."

[1] ABRAM AND THE IDOL SHOP: One day Terah climbed the mountain, and there, to his delight, he found Abram alive and well. Terah brought him back to Ur.

A maker of idols, Terah carved images of wood and stone, which he sold in his shop. One day he went to market and left the boy to take care of the shop.

Soon a man came to buy an idol to protect his home, and Abram showed him an idol that was fierce of countenance. Greatly pleased, the man selected it as his god.

The lad could not contain himself. "How old are you?" he asked.

"I am fifty years of age, and have been a soldier for more than thirty years," was the answer.

Abram laughed. "You are fifty, whereas this idol was carved by my father only last week. And though you are a seasoned warrior, you seek protection from it!" Startled, the man left the shop.

An old woman entered next. "My house has been robbed, and my god was stolen from me. Sell me another," she said.

אָדון יֵשׁ עֲלֵיהֶם – אֱלֹי אֶתְפֹּלֶל וְאֱלֹי אֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה.

them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan. [2] But when they came to the city of Haran, they settled there. And Terah died in Haran.

ABRAM ARRIVES IN CANAAN  
NOW THE LORD said to Abram, "Get you

up out of your country, and from your kinsmen, and from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless you, and

Abram smiled. "Your idol could not protect even himself, yet you wish to buy another!" The woman ran out angrily.

[1] THE IDOL SMASHER: Abram looked at the rows of idols about him, and picked up an axe. He smashed all but the largest of them, and put the axe in its hands. When Terah returned, he found the shop littered with fragments, while only the large idol remained whole. "Who has done this?" he cried, appalled.

Abram was ready with an answer. "The idols were hungry, and I brought them food. The big god seized your axe, killed them all, and ate all the food himself."

Terah stared at the boy. "Abram, you are mocking me! You know well that idols can neither move, nor eat, nor perform any act."

And then Abram said to his father, "Father, let your ears hear what your tongue speaks."

🔗 [2] ABRAM LEAVES UR: Nimrod continued to persecute Terah and his family, and the time came when Abram left, taking his father and all his household with him.

The Rabbis asked, "Why did not God protect Abram so that he need not leave?"

They answered that God wished him to spread His truths throughout the world. The Midrash says that Abram was like a vial of perfume: when he remained in Ur, it was as if the vial were tightly sealed, and none knew its value or enjoyed its scent. When Abram left, it was as though the vial were opened and its fragrance shared.

any one that curses you I will curse; and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

So Abram took his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot, with all their possessions that they had accumulated, and the souls that they had acquired in Haran; [3] and they set out for the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

And Abram passed through the land as far as Shechem. [4] The Canaanites were then in the land.

And the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your children I will give this land."

And Abram built there an altar to the Lord, who appeared to him. And then Abram journeyed, going on his way to the Negev.

🔗 [3] THE SOULS THEY HAD ACQUIRED: All the wise men of the earth together could not create a mosquito. Yet we read that Abram was "acquiring souls," (the Hebrew refers to "the souls he created"). How does one "create souls"?

He who brings a person near to God is as though he had created him, answers the Midrash.

Soon after Terah and his family settled in Haran, the Haranites heard tell of Abram and his good works. Because he was hospitable, gave freely to the needy, and executed righteousness, his name was blessed.

"All that you do, prospers," the Haranites told him. "Teach us, that we may do that which is right before God and man."

Thus Abram "created souls."

🔗 [4] THE JOURNEY TO CANAAN: Why did Abram pass through Aram-naharaim, a good land and fertile, to settle elsewhere? Because he saw that its people depended on the richness of the land, and lived lives of idleness, with feasting and drinking throughout the day. "O Lord," Abram prayed, "may I be preserved from living as do these!"

When he came to Shechem, Abram saw that its people worked diligently, plowing and sowing, harvesting and threshing, and that each man shared in the labor. These Abram blessed; and he prayed, "O Lord, may my lot be as theirs!"

וַיְבָרְכוּ בְךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחוֹת הָאֲדָמָה.

## ABRAM PARTS FROM LOT

ABRAM WAS VERY rich in cattle, in silver and in gold. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support them staying together. And quarrels arose between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and of Lot's cattle. [5]

Then Abram said to Lot, "I beg you, let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdmen and your herdmen; for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land open to you? Separate yourself, please, from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right, then I will go to the left."

Lot looked and saw that all the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. So Lot chose all the plain of the Jordan.

So they parted one from another. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinned against the Lord greatly.

And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, "Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, to the north and to the south, to the east and to the west; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of

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❧ [5] THE SHEPHERD'S QUARREL: Abram gave his shepherds a purse, saying, "Give this gold to the owners of the land, that our herds may not trespass when they graze." This his men did. Moreover, they muzzled the cattle so that they would not graze in fields through which they passed.

Lot's men, however, pastured their sheep without permission. Abram's shepherds said to them, "Why do you pasture on land which is not your master's?" The servants of Lot replied, "Did not God say to Abram: To you and to your descendants will I give all this land? Since Abram is childless, Lot will inherit his possessions. Therefore, this land on which the flocks graze really belongs to Lot."

When Abram heard of this he said to Lot, "Kinsman, let us separate and go each his way."

שֶׁאֶבְרָם עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא מִן הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה שָׂם, צָפוֹנָה וּנְגִבָה וּקְדָמָה וַיִּמָּה, כִּי  
אֵת כָּל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה רוֹאֶה לְךָ אֶתְנַנָּה וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ עַד עוֹלָם.



the earth; so only if one can count the dust of the earth shall your descendants be counted. Arise, walk throughout the land, [6] for I will give it to you.”

And Abram moved his tent and went to dwell beside the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron. And there he built an altar to the Lord.

#### ABRAM IN BATTLE WITH FOUR KINGS

THE KING OF Shinar, the king of Ellasar, the king of Elam, and the king of Goiim made war against the king of Sodom, and against the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela—the four against the five. They joined in the valley of Siddim, which is the Salt Sea.

Now the valley of Siddim was full of slime pits. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there; and the survivors fled to the mountains. The victors seized all the goods and provisions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and went their way. And they carried off Lot, the nephew of Abram, and his goods; for he was living in Sodom.

A fugitive came and told Abram.

And when Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he called out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen men, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He and his servants fell upon the enemy at night and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is on the left side of Damascus. And he recovered all the goods, and also brought back his kinsman Lot, and his goods, and the women and the people.

And Melchizedek, the king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tenth of all.

The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people, and keep the goods for yourself.”

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will not take anything that is yours, not a thread or a shoelace,

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☞ [6] WALK THROUGH THE LAND: Why did God tell Abram to walk through the land after He promised it to him? Only he who knows the land can possess it.

הַרִימוֹתַי יָדַי אֶל יְיָ, אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן, קוֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, אִם מַחוּט וְעַד שְׂרוּף נֶעַל  
וְאִם אֶקַּח מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר לִי.

lest you say: It was I who made Abram rich. Only let the men who went with me take their share."

#### GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM

AFTER THESE EVENTS, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great."

And Abram said, "O Lord God, what canst Thou give me when I am childless, and my heir will be my steward, Eliezer of Damascus?"

And the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This man shall not be your heir; but one born to you shall be your heir."

Then He took Abram outside and said, "Now look at the sky, and count

the stars. Are you able to count them? So shall be your descendants." And Abram trusted in the Lord.

And it came to pass that, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and a dread, like a great darkness, came over him. And God said to Abram, "Know that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will judge that nation which they will serve; and afterward they shall come out with great wealth. But you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age."

And when the sun went down and it was very dark, there appeared a smoking furnace and a flaming torch. [7] On that day the Lord made a covenant

🔥 [7] A SMOKING FURNACE: Why did a great dread descend on Abraham, and why did he see a fiery furnace and a torch?

The future which God was promising him was not one of ease and wealth, but of stern obligation. The covenant demanded that Abraham and his descendants accept justice and righteousness as a way of life, and that they carry God's message to the world.

It is not easy to accept such a role. Because the future would be difficult, the vision came with darkness and dread. The furnace was the symbol of the suffering of the Jew; the torch, that he would be a light unto the nations.

Despite the burden that lay ahead, Abraham trusted in the Lord. Such true faith is in itself considered righteousness.

To this day the Jews live according to this vision and the covenant.

הַבֶּט־נָא הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים, אִם תּוּכַל לְסַפֵּר אוֹתָם, כֹּה יִהְיֶה וְרַעְךָ.

with Abram, saying, “To your descendants do I give this land.”

ISHMAEL IS BORN

NOW ABRAM’S WIFE Sarai bore him no children; and she had an Egyptian maid

whose name was Hagar. And Sarai took Hagar, and gave her in marriage to her husband Abram.

And Hagar bore a son to Abram; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

לְיִרְעָה נָתַתִּי אֶת הָאֲרֶץ הַזֹּאת.



## 4. GENESIS [17-21]

### NEW NAMES—ABRAHAM AND SARAH

WHEN ABRAM WAS ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am *El Shaddai*; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and will make you great in number." And Abram bowed low as God spoke to him. "My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. Therefore, your name shall no longer be called Abram, but it shall be Abraham. As for Sarai, your wife, you

shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah. And moreover, I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her."

Then Abraham bowed low, but he laughed and he said to himself, "Can he who is one hundred years old become a father? Or can Sarah, who is ninety, bear a child?" So he said to God, "May Ishmael live before Thee!"

But God said, "Nevertheless, your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant to his children after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you;

וְלֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת שְׁמִי אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמִי אַבְרָהָם.

and indeed, I have blessed him, and will multiply him greatly. He shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season in the next year.

“This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout all generations; every male among you shall

be circumcised. And this shall be a token of the covenant between Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised.”

THREE MEN VISIT ABRAHAM

AS ABRAHAM WAS sitting at the entrance of his tent [1] in the heat of the day, he looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran

🔗 [1] THE HOSPITABLE ABRAHAM: Abraham lived for many years in Beer-sheba, where he built a gracious dwelling. It stood in the midst of a beautiful garden which had gates facing in every direction, so that travelers might find their way inside with ease.

Abraham became known far and wide because his home was open, day and night, to any traveler or wandering beggar. If his guest was hungry, Abraham gave him food; if he needed clothing, Abraham gave him garments; and he provided him with food and money for his journey.

When thanked, Abraham had one reply, “Do not thank me. Give thanks to God, who provides food and drink to all His creatures.” Then the visitor would acknowledge God, and bless Him. Thus, Abraham’s home was not only a place of rest for the weary wanderer, but also of the teaching of the knowledge of God and His Law.

One stormy night, an old man stumbled across the threshold. Abraham made a fire to warm the wanderer. He washed his feet, gave him fresh garments, and served him food.

“Now I will thank my god who led me to your dwelling,” the old man said. From his bosom he took a small wooden idol, and before it he knelt in prayer.

Abraham spoke softly, “Old man, are you not ashamed to bow

וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם. וּבֶן שְׁמוֹנֶת יָמִים יְמוֹל לָכֶם כָּל זָכָר.

to meet them and bowed down to the ground, and said, "My lords, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass by without stopping with your servant. Let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and recline under the tree while I fetch a bit of bread to refresh you. After that, you may go on your way." And they said, "Do as you have said."

Abraham hurried into the tent to

Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make cakes."

And Abraham ran to the herd and fetched a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it.

And he took curd and milk and the calf which had been prepared, and set it before them. And he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

before a piece of carved wood, an image made by the hand of man? Thank the true God who created the heaven and the earth."

The stranger interrupted him. "This is the god which I have worshiped all my days. I will not forsake him."

Angered, Abraham drove him from the house. The old man went out into the night.

Abraham lay upon his bed, but could not sleep. Then God's voice spoke: "Where is the old man whom you sheltered from the storm?"

"I drove the idolater from my house," Abraham answered, "for I could tolerate him no longer."

"I have tolerated him for full seventy years," said God, "and for full seventy years kept him and sustained him. But you could not endure him a single night!"

Shame-faced, Abraham went out into the darkness to bring back the old man. He apologized and promised the stranger that he could worship as he chose.

The next morning, God revealed Himself to Abraham, and said, "As you overcame your pride before the old man, so will I be long-suffering and forgiving to your descendants. Though they rebel and turn from Me so that I must punish them, it will be with compassion. Never will I abandon them. I will remember My covenant: they will be My people, and I will be their God."

יִקַּח נָא מֵעֵט מִים וְרִחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֵנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ וְאַקְחָה פֶּת לָחֶם וְסַעֲדוּ  
לְבַבְכֶּם, אַחֵר תַּעֲבְרוּ.

And they said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

And he said, "Inside the tent."

Then one said, "I will return to you next year at this season; and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son."

Sarah was listening behind the tent door. Now Abraham and Sarah were very old. And Sarah laughed to herself, and said, "I am old, and my lord is old also. Can I bear a child at this age?"

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying: Can I really bear a child, when I am so old? Is anything impossible for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, and Sarah shall have a son."

Then the men rose, and turned to-

ward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to see them off.

And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? I have singled him out that he may instruct his children and his family after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice."

#### ABRAHAM PRAYS FOR SODOM

THE LORD SAID, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sins are very grave. I will go down, [2] and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me. [3] And if not, I will know."

But Abraham stood before the Lord

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❧ [2] I WILL GO DOWN: Why did God Himself descend to see how Sodom and Gomorrah sinned? Did He not see from above?

From this example is derived the Jewish law that no judge may determine innocence or guilt without facing the accused.

❧ [3] THE OUTCRY THAT HAS REACHED ME: Those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah were the richest of all men. Their land blossomed as the Garden of Eden. Its stones were sapphire, and its dust gold. The trees were heavy with fruit, and crops sprang untended from the soil.

As their wealth grew, so did their greed. "We do not wish strangers among us," they said. "They come here to take something from us." Any traveler who strayed into their cities was made to regret that he had come.

If by chance a poor man wandered their way, they welcomed him with false smiles, and gave him marked coins. When he tried to buy

הִיפֹּלָא מִי דְּבָר? לְמוֹעֵד אָשׁוּב אֵלַיָּךְ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וּלְשָׂרָה בֵּן.



and said, "Wilt Thou destroy the righteous along with the guilty? Suppose there are fifty righteous men in the city; wilt Thou still destroy and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous men who are in it? Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to make the righteous perish with the wicked, so that good and bad fare alike. Shall not the Judge of all the earth act justly?"

And the Lord said, "If I find fifty

righteous men within the city, I will forgive the entire place for their sake."

Abraham answered and said, "Now that I have dared to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes, [4] suppose there are five short of the fifty righteous men; wilt Thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?"

And He replied, "I will not destroy it if I will find forty-five there."

Abraham spoke to Him still again,

food, no one would accept the marked coins, and the stranger starved though his purse was full. When he had perished, each man took back his marked coins.

They did not look after widows and orphans, though they hungered. They devised evil each against his fellow, seized gold by oppression, and in their laws favored the rich over the poor. Despite their greed, iniquity and shedding of innocent blood, God did not smite them—for He is gracious and long-suffering—until a certain cry reached His ears.

It came about through the friendship of two young girls. The father of one was robbed of all he possessed by a gang of clever thieves. They had asked him to guard fifty gold coins which they had secretly dipped in an aromatic oil. Soon after, they broke into his house and stole all his money as well as their own gold, which they located easily by its scent. What is more, they brought him to trial and demanded the money they had entrusted to him. Because he could not pay it, he was sold into slavery. His family was left penniless.

One day his daughter met her friend at the well. "Why are you so pale?" the second girl asked.

"I am faint for food," she replied. "It is two days since I have eaten."

"Wait here until I come back," her companion said. When she

הֵאָף תִּסְפֶּה צַדִּיק עִם רָשָׁע?

and said, "Perhaps forty will be found there?"

And He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty."

Then Abraham said, "Oh, let not the Lord be angry if I should say: perhaps thirty will be found there."

And the Lord said, "I will not do it if I find thirty."

And Abraham said, "Now that I have dared to speak to the Lord, suppose twenty are found there?"

And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty."

returned, she murmured, "Let us exchange pitchers." Her pitcher was full of flour.

For some days the friend smuggled food to the hungry girl, until the men of Sodom sought to know how the poor family survived. When they learned the answer, the kind-hearted girl was arrested and condemned to death. Her body was smeared with honey and she was bound between two beehives. The girl screamed in agony as the bees stung her to death.

It was then that the Lord said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great. I will go down."

🕊 [4] I HAVE DARED TO SPEAK: How dared Abraham question God? His act may seem bold, but it typifies the relationship of the Jew to God. Abraham was only the first who acted in the Jewish tradition that injustice must be protested, even to God Himself.

It was in this spirit that, in a time of great oppression, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev stood before the open *Aron Kodesh* and contended with God:

"Oh, Master of the world,  
I, Levi Yitzhak, son of Sarah of Berdichev,  
Come in judgment against You  
In behalf of Your people, Israel.  
What do You want of Your people?  
Why do You afflict us?  
I shall not stir from here,  
Until there be an end to this.  
Magnified and sanctified be His great Name!"

אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִחַר לֵאדֹנֵי וְאֲדִבְרָה: אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלִשִּׁים.

Then Abraham said, "Oh, let not the Lord be angry if I should speak once more: perhaps ten shall be found there."

And the Lord said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."

The Lord went His way when He had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

#### THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

THE TWO ANGELS came to Sodom at evening, and Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose and greeted them; and he bowed to the ground, and he said, "If you please, my lords, come into your servant's house and stay the night, and wash your feet. Then you may rise early and go on your way."

They said, "No, we will pass the night in the street."

But Lot urged them strongly, so that they went to his house. He prepared a feast for them, and he baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

But before they lay down, the men of Sodom, young and old, surrounded the house. And they shouted to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, and we will know what to do to them."

Lot went to the door and said, "I pray

you, my friends, do not be wicked. Do nothing to these men, as they have come under the shelter of my roof."

But they said, "Get out of the way!" and added, "This fellow came to us as a stranger, and now he acts the judge. We will deal with you worse than with them."

They pressed hard against Lot, and tried to reach the door and break it. But the angels reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house, and shut the door. And they struck the men that were at the door with blindness so that they searched in vain for the entrance.

And the angels said to Lot, "Is there anyone else here belonging to you—sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone at all that belongs to you in the city? Take them out of the place, for we are about to destroy it, because the outcry is so great before the Lord that He has sent us to destroy it."

And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law. "Leave this place at once, for the Lord will destroy the city." But his sons-in-law thought he was jesting.

When dawn appeared, the angels hastened Lot, saying, "Hurry, take your wife and your two daughters that are here; otherwise you will be swept away in the iniquity of the city."

But Lot hesitated, and the angels

הָאֶחָד בָּא לְגֹר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט – עָתָה נֵרַע לָךְ מֵהֶם.

seized his hand, and the hand of his wife, and the hands of his two daughters, because the Lord had pity on them. They brought him out, and set him outside the city, and one said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain. Fly to the hills, lest you be swept away!"

And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, if your servant has found favor in your eyes, and in your mercy you have saved my life, I cannot escape to the mountains. The disaster may overtake me, and I will die. Here is a town nearby, and it is a little one; oh, let me escape there, and save my life."

And He said to him, "See, I grant you this also; I will not destroy the town of which you have spoken. Hurry, and fly there, for I can do nothing till you have come there."

As the sun rose over the earth, Lot came to Zoar, which was the name of the town. Then the Lord rained sulphur and fire from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah. And He destroyed these cities, and all the Plain, with all its inhabitants and everything that grew. But Lot's

wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

In the morning, Abraham went to the place where he had stood before the Lord. And he looked out toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the region of the Plain, and saw the smoke from the land rising like the smoke of a furnace.

#### THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

THE LORD KEPT His promise to Sarah as He had said. At the set time she bore a son to Abraham in his old age. And Abraham gave the name of Isaac to his son whom Sarah had borne to him.

And Abraham circumcised Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded. Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

And Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me."

The child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned.

וַיִּקְרָא אֲבִרָהָם אֶת שֵׁם בְּנוֹ הַנּוֹלֵד לוֹ, אִשָּׁךְ יִלְדָּהּ לוֹ שָׂרָה, יִצְחָק.



## 5. GENESIS [22-23]

### THE BINDING OF ISAAC—AKÉDAH

IT CAME TO PASS that God put Abraham to test, and said to him, "Abraham." And he answered, "Here I am."

And He said, "Take your son, [1]

your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt-offering upon one of the hills which I will tell you of." [2]

Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, [3] and took

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[1] TAKE YOUR SON! The Hebrew reads *kah-na*, which means "please take your son." Why did God say "please" to a mortal? Because He recognized how difficult His command was, said the Rabbis, but knew its lesson was important to mankind.

After Isaac had been released and the ram sacrificed, the puzzled father questioned the Lord. "Well You know, O Lord, that I would not withhold from You either my son or my soul. Why, therefore, did You find need to test me so?"

קח-נָא אֶת בְּנֶךְךָ, אֶת יְחִידְךָ, אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֶּתָּ, אֶת יִצְחָק, וְלֶךְ-לְךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ מֹרְיָה  
וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה.

two of his servants with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut wood for the burnt-offering, and set out for the place of which God had told him.

On the third day Abraham raised his

eyes and saw the place in the distance. Then Abraham said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy will go there, and we will worship and return to you."

"That the world might know why I chose you from all others," was the reply, "when they witnessed your loyalty and trust in Me.

"And also because there are those who offer their first-born to their gods. I, the God of Righteousness, do not wish such offerings. You suffered an agony of fear that the world might know that human sacrifice is an abomination to Me."

🔗 [2] ONE OF THE HILLS: Why was a certain hill chosen over any other? Legend says that on opposite sides of this mount there lived two brothers. One was married and had sons and daughters, the other was unwed.

One moonlit night, after the harvest had been gathered, the brothers sat each in his own house. "My brother is alone," the married man was thinking. "There is no one to care for him when he grows old. He should have a larger share of the harvest. I shall take him a sack of wheat to store up for the time of his need."

At the same time the other brother was saying to himself, "My brother has many mouths to feed. It is not right that I share equally with him in the harvest. I shall bring him an extra sack in secret, so that his family will not want."

Both brothers rose and left their homes. Each filled a sack from his portion of the wheat. They climbed the hill from opposite sides, each bent under a heavy sack. At the summit of the hill they met in the moonlight. There they recognized each other, and took in the meaning of the gifts they bore. As they embraced, the Lord looked down and said, "This place is holy. Here shall My glory rest."

It was here that Abraham bound Isaac as a sacrifice, and here that the holy Temple was erected.

שְׁבוּ לָכֶם פֶּה עִם הַחֲמוֹר, וְאֲנִי וְהַנֶּעֱר גִּלְכָּה עַד כָּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt-offering, and put it upon his son Isaac; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and the two of them went together. [4]

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father."

And Abraham answered, "Here I am, my son."

And he said, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?"

And Abraham said, "God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son."

So they went, both of them together. And they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built

the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. As Abraham put out his hand and took the knife to slay his son, the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" [5]

And he replied, "Here I am."

And he said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy, neither do anything to him; for now I know that you revere God, for you did not withhold your son, your only son from Me."

Abraham looked up, and saw behind him a ram caught in the brushwood by its horns. And Abraham took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt-offering in place of his son.

❧ [3] ABRAHAM SADDLED HIS DONKEY: Why did not Abraham summon his servants for so menial a task?

When God commands, reply our Sages, one does not call a servant. Abraham rose early and performed the service himself.

❧ [4] THE TWO OF THEM WENT TOGETHER: The ancient legends tell us that Satan, who had instigated the entire matter of the sacrifice, tried to make the trial harder for Abraham by telling Isaac his fate. Neither Abraham nor Isaac heeded him, however. The reason? Not even the truth is accepted from the liar and the scorner.

❧ [5] THE ANGEL OF THE LORD: It was the Lord who commanded that Abraham offer up his son, but an angel who told him to desist. Of this the Rabbis say: to destroy we need the authority of God Himself, but even the smallest angel can serve to show mercy.

אַל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנֶּעֱר וְאַל תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָּה.

And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "The Lord says, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will bless you, and will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand upon the seashore. And all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your descendants, because you obeyed My command."

So Abraham returned to his servants, and together they went to Beer-sheba.

#### THE DEATH OF SARAH

THE LIFE OF Sarah was one hundred and twenty-seven years. And Sarah died in Hebron, in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

Then Abraham rose from the side of his dead, and said to the children of Heth, "I am a stranger among you, but I live here. Sell me a burial-place for my dead."

And the children of Heth answered Abraham, "You are a mighty prince among us; in the best of our burial-places bury your dead."

Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the Hittites, and he said to them, "If you consent that I bury my dead, entreat Ephron the son of Zohar on my behalf, that he may give me the

Cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him. Let him sell it to me in your presence for the full price as a burial-ground."

Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of all, saying, "No, my lord, hear me. I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of my kinsmen I give it to you. Bury your dead."

And Abraham bowed before the people of the land. And he spoke to Ephron in their presence, saying, "Please hear me out! I will give you the price of the field. Take it from me, and I will bury my dead there."

And Ephron answered Abraham, "My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? Bury your dead."

Abraham accepted Ephron's offer; and Abraham weighed the silver, which he had named in the hearing of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, the current money among the merchants.

So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, facing Mamre, and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, passed into the possession of Abraham.

And Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave in the field of Machpelah, in Hebron, in the land of Canaan.

וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזֶרְעָךָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עִקָּב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹלִי.





## 6. GENESIS [24-25]

### ABRAHAM SENDS ELIEZER TO ARAM-NAHARAIM

NOW ABRAHAM was old, well-advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who had charge over all that he had, "Swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the

God of the earth, that you will not let my son marry a daughter of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." [1]

And the servant said to him, "Suppose the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land, am I to take your son back to the land from which you came?"

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[1] A DAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITES: Abraham commanded Eliezer not to allow Isaac to marry a Canaanite; however, Laban and his family were also idol-worshipers. What advantage was there in a wife from afar, who was also a pagan?

Some Rabbis explained that the Canaanite religion was worse than

וַיִּבְרַךְ אֶת אֲבִרְהָם בְּכָל.

And Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there! The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying: 'To your descendants will I give this land;' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you shall be free from this oath to me; but do not take my son back there."

And the servant swore to Abraham to do this thing. So the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, bearing with him many of his master's valuables. And he went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor.

It was evening, the time that women come out to draw water, when he made the camels kneel outside the city by

the well. And he said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, give me success today and show kindness to my master Abraham. Here I stand by the well, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I say: Please, lower your pitcher for me to drink, answer: Drink, and I will give your camels drink also; let her be the one whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown kindness to my master."

#### ELIEZER MEETS REBEKAH

BEFORE HE HAD finished speaking, Rebekah came out with her pitcher upon her shoulder. [2] She was the daughter of Bethuel, the grandson of Nahor, Abraham's brother. And the girl was very beautiful; and she went down to the

the Haranite religion, because it included child sacrifice and other abominations.

Others believed that Abraham feared that a Canaanite girl, living near her friends and family, would hold on to pagan customs. A Haranite, however, finding Canaanite ways foreign, would not be lured by them nor lead Isaac astray.

☞ [2] REBEKAH: Rebekah was born at the very moment that Sarah died. She grew to be a beautiful girl who found favor in everyone's eyes. Although her father was rich and gave her maids and servants, she helped in the home, even when very young. She went to the well

הוא יִשְׁלַח מִלְאָכוֹ לִפְנֵיהֶּ וְלִקְחָתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִשָּׁם.

spring and filled her pitcher. As she came up, the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher."

And she said, "Drink, sir;" and she quickly lowered the pitcher and let him drink. When he had drunk his fill she said, "I will draw for your camels also."

She hurriedly emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran to the well to draw more water and drew for all his camels. And the man gazed steadily at her, and wondered in silence whether the Lord had made his journey successful or not.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring and two heavy golden bracelets, and he said, "Whose daughter are you, please tell me. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge?"

And she said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the grandson of Nahor." And she added, "We have straw and fodder enough, and room to lodge in." [3]

And the man bowed his head, and kneeled before the Lord. And he said,

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His kindness and truth to my master; the Lord has led me to the house of my master's brethren."

And the girl ran, and told her mother's household all that had happened.

#### REBEKAH LEAVES HER HOME

REBEKAH HAD a brother named Laban. When he saw the ring and the bracelets, and when he heard Rebekah's words, he went out to the man at the well.

And Laban said, "Come in, blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside when I have cleared the house and made room for the camels?"

Eliezer came into the house, and the camels were unharnessed and given straw and fodder, and water was brought to wash his feet and the feet of the men with him. Then food was set before him; but he said, "I will not eat until I have made known my errand."

And Laban said, "Speak on."

And the man said, "I am the servant

for water, in place of the servants, in order to meet the villagers and to see if any needed help.

Although Rebekah went out of her way to help the poor, there was little of kindness or charity among the other Haranites, her own family included. Therefore, when Eliezer told her how kind Isaac and his father were, she was pleased.

בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרָהֶם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָזַב חֶסְדּוֹ וְאַמְתּוֹ מֵעַם אֲדֹנָי.

of Abraham. The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become very rich. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maid-servants, camels and donkeys. And Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master when she was old; and he is leaving him everything he has. And my master made me swear, saying: You shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell. But you shall go to my father's home, and take a wife for my son from my kindred. And I said to my master: Perhaps the woman will not follow me! And he said to me: The Lord, in whose path I walk, will send His angel with you and prosper your way; and you shall take a wife for my son of

my kindred, and of my father's house. And now, if you will deal kindly and honorably with my master, tell me, and if not, tell me; that I may turn one way or another."

Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is the Lord's doing; we dare not say anything. Here is Rebekah. Take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken."

When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed down to the earth before the Lord. Then he brought out jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious gifts to her brother and to her mother.

Then he and the men with him ate

❧ [3] THE GRACIOUS REBEKAH: At the well, Eliezer saw a comely maiden approaching with a jug on her shoulder. She stopped beside a crying child, whose foot had been cut on a sharp stone. She washed the wound and bound it with her kerchief. "Do not worry," she comforted him. "It soon will heal."

A half-blind woman had come to the well to draw water. Rebekah helped her carry the full pitcher to her home. When she returned, Eliezer asked, "Will you give me a little water?"

"Drink, sir," she said, lowering her pitcher. Then she drew water for his camels. The other girls mocked her because she served a stranger, but she ignored their jeers.

Eliezer felt this was a suitable wife for Isaac, for she was kind as well as beautiful. "Whose daughter are you?" he inquired. When she told him, Eliezer blessed God who had not forsaken Abraham.

הִנֵּה רִבְקָה לְכַנִּיךָ קַח וְלֵךְ, וְתָהִי אִשָּׁה לְבֶן-אֲדֹנָיִךְ.

and drank, and stayed the night. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master."

But Rebekah's brother and mother said, "Let the maiden stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that she shall go."

But he said, "Do not delay me, since God has prospered my way. Let me go that I may return to my master."

And they said, "We will call the maiden, and ask her wishes." [4] And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?"

And she said, "I will go."

So they sent Rebekah off with her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, saying to her, "May you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and may

your descendants possess the gates of their enemies."

And the servant took Rebekah and her maids, and went his way.

#### REBEKAH BECOMES THE WIFE OF ISAAC

ONE EVENING, Isaac went out to meditate in the field; and he lifted up his eyes, and there he saw camels coming.

And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. And she said to the servant, "Who is this man walking in the field toward us?"

And the servant answered, "It is my master." So she took her veil, and covered herself.

🕎 [4] WE WILL CALL THE MAIDEN AND ASK HER WISHES: This line indicates, say our Rabbis, that a woman cannot be given in marriage by her father or older brother against her wishes. She must be asked and give her assent.

🕎 [5] ISAAC WAS COMFORTED: Isaac had loved his mother dearly, our Sages said, for she had been a worthy and gracious woman, good to the poor, her door ever open to the needy. She baked fresh loaves for the Sabbath, kindled the Sabbath lights, and kept the festivals. When she died, there was sorrow among all the people.

Rebekah took Sarah's place. Once more the poor were welcomed; the lights twinkled in blessing every Sabbath and holiday; and joy returned to the home of Abraham and Isaac. So Isaac was comforted for his mother.

אֲחֻתִּנוּ, אֵת הָיִי לְאִלְפֵי רַבָּבָה, וַיִּרְשׁ זֶרַעךָ אֶת שַׁעַר שׁוּנְאָיו.

Then the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac brought Rebekah to his mother's tent, and took her as his wife; and he loved her. Thus Isaac was comforted for his mother. [5]

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

AND ABRAHAM lived a hundred and sev-

enty-five years; and he died at a ripe old age. And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the field which Abraham had purchased from the children of Heth. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah.

And after the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ.



## 7. GENESIS [25-28]

### ESAU AND JACOB ARE BORN

ISAAC WAS FORTY years old when he married Rebekah. And Isaac prayed to God on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord heard his prayers, and Rebekah became pregnant. And the

children struggled within her; [1] and she said, "If it is to be like this, why do I live?"

So she inquired of the Lord. And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your body,  
And two peoples shall be separated  
from you;

[1] THE STRUGGLING OF JACOB AND ESAU: Though twins, Esau and Jacob were entirely different from one another. Esau was selfish and cruel; Jacob was virtuous. Even before they were born, they began their eternal quarreling.

Each brother wished to be born first, so as to win the birthright. When Esau threatened to kill their mother, Jacob let him go first, but held on to his heel.

שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבֶטֶן וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדּוּ.

And the one people shall be stronger than the other; And the elder shall serve the younger.”

When the time of delivery came, there were indeed twins within her. And the first-born was ruddy, and hairy all over; so they called him Esau [the hairy one]. Then his brother was born, with his hand holding on to Esau’s heels; and so

his name was called Jacob [one who holds by the heel]. And Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

The boys grew up; and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a quiet man, [2] dwelling in tents. [3]

Now Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; [4] and Rebekah loved Jacob.

🔗 [2] JACOB WAS A QUIET MAN: “Why did Isaac favor Esau?” the Rabbis asked. “Could he not see that Jacob was the faithful son?”

It was hard to judge Esau and Jacob when they were young. All trees look alike when they are shoots; when they mature, one may be green and fruitful, the other dry and covered with thorns. Both brothers went to school in their childhood, and their ways did not part until their thirteenth year. Then Jacob continued to study in the *Bét ha-Midrash* of Shem and Eber, but Esau became a hunter and a worshiper of idols.

🔗 [3] THE HUNTER VERSUS THE DWELLER IN TENTS: Esau was a tireless hunter who enjoyed the excitement of tracking and killing animals; Jacob liked to study the wisdom taught in the academies.

Through the centuries ever since, the descendants of Jacob have abhorred war, and have rejoiced in study and in doing of good deeds. Their models have been heroes of the spirit: prophets and scholars. The descendants of Esau, however, have been warriors; their delight has been in warfare, and their peacetime spent in bloody sports.

🔗 [4] FOND OF GAME: The Hebrew words *tzayid b’fiv* are usually translated to mean “fond of game.” That is, Isaac favored his son Esau because of the kind of food he brought him. But these words can also be translated “skillful with his mouth.” Esau was a deceiver, adept at flattery; he fooled Isaac.

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים, וַיְהִי עֲשׂוֹ אִישׁ יוֹדֵעַ צִיד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה, וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יוֹשֵׁב אֹהֲלִים.



## ESAU SELLS HIS BIRTHRIGHT

ONE TIME, WHEN Jacob was making pottage, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me swallow some of this red pottage, for I am famished." [5]

But Jacob said, "Sell me first your birthright."

And Esau said, "I am at the point of dying, so what use is this birthright to me?"

Then Jacob said, "Swear to me first."

And Esau gave him his oath, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and stewed lentils; and

he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. [6]

## ISAAC AND THE WELLS

THERE WAS A famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar.

And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you, and will bless you. To you and to your children I will give all these lands, to fulfill the oath which I swore to Abra-

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🌀 [5] LET ME SWALLOW SOME OF THIS RED POTTAGE: Esau asked Jacob, "Why are you preparing lentils?"

"Our grandfather Abraham has passed away, and I am preparing lentils for our father's mourner's meal," Jacob replied. "You know that lentils and eggs are the mourner's meal, for they are round as a wheel. Life too is like a wheel: for every death there is a birth; life ends, and life begins."

Esau's voice was harsh. "The old man died, like anyone else. Abraham, the friend of God, is gone too!" He looked at the pot of food. "Come, give me some of your lentil pottage! I am famished!"

"I did not prepare it for you," Jacob replied.

"I'll give you my birthright for the pottage," his brother offered. Jacob was shocked. "Your birthright!"

"Of what use is my birthright?" said the other. "I am a hunter, always close to death. Whatever I can get today, I take."

So Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentils.

הַלְעִיטֵנִי נָא מִן הָאֲדָם הָאֲדָם הַזֶּה.

ham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, so that all the nations of the earth will bless one another by them, because Abraham listened to My voice and observed My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

And Isaac dwelled in Gerar. And Isaac sowed a crop in that land, and obtained that year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. And the man became great, and grew more and more until he was very great. He had flocks of sheep, and herds of cattle, and a great household; and the Philistines envied him.

And all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the time of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped up and filled them with earth.

And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go from us, for you have grown too powerful for us."

Isaac left there, and settled in the valley of Gerar. He reopened the wells

of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, but which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death. And he gave them the same names his father had called them. But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of living water, the herdmen of Gerar disputed over it, saying, "The water is ours."

So Isaac's servants dug in another place, and the herdmen of Gerar disputed over that also. So he moved from there, and dug another well; and there was no dispute over this. And he called it Rehoboth; and he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us."

And he went up from there to Beer-sheba. And the Lord appeared to him the same night, and said, "I am the God of Abraham, your father. Do not fear, for I am with you, and will bless you, and multiply your children for the sake of My servant Abraham."

And Isaac built an altar there, and

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🔗 [6] ESAU DESPISED HIS BIRTHRIGHT: How do we know that Esau despised his birthright? Because he brought his friends to Jacob's tent and said to them, "Look at the fool! I ate his lentils, drank his wine, and do you know what I gave him for these good things? My birthright!"

They all laughed at Jacob and jeered at him.

Later, however, Esau complained that Jacob had deceived him and had taken the birthright away by cunning.

אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ. אֶל תִּירָא כִּי אֶתָּךְ אֲנֹכִי.

called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there.

Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar, with his friends. And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me, and drove me away from you?"

And they said, "We saw plainly that the Lord was with you, and we said: Let there be an oath between us and you. Let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, as we have not touched you, but have sent you away in peace. You are indeed the blessed of the Lord."

And he made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. When they arose in the morning, they swore to one another; and they departed from him in peace. And it came to pass that same day that Isaac's servant came and told him about

the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water."

So Isaac called the place Shibah [fortunate]. Therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.

#### JACOB GETS HIS FATHER'S BLESSING

WHEN ISAAC HAD become old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called Esau, his elder son, and said to him, "My son."

And Esau replied, "Here I am."

Then Isaac said, "See, I am old, and know not the day of my death. Therefore, please take your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and get some game for me. Then make me a tasty dish, such as I love, and bring it to me to eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."

So Esau went to the field to hunt for

🔥 [7] MY BROTHER'S BLESSING: When Rebekah told Jacob to prepare the meat that he might receive Isaac's blessing, he protested, "I cannot take my brother's blessing."

But Rebekah insisted, "Esau holds the worship of God in contempt. Why, then, should he receive God's blessing?" Still Jacob refused to go.

Then Rebekah said, "If there is a sin in this, let it be on my soul. It is Esau's mother who says he does not deserve the blessing, for he spurns God and takes foreign wives. I command you to take his place!"

Only then, and reluctantly, did Jacob prepare to go in to Isaac.

עַל-כֵּן שֵׁם הָעִיר בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

game to bring to Isaac. Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. And she said to Jacob, "I heard your father say to your brother Esau: Bring me some game and make me a tasty dish, that I may bless you before the Lord before I die. Now, my son, listen to that which I command you. Go to the flock and get me two choice kids; and I will make them into a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. Then you will bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies."

And Jacob said to his mother, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man, while I am smooth-skinned. Perhaps my father will touch me, and I shall seem to him a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse on myself, not a blessing." [7]

But his mother said, "Let any curse for you, my son, fall on me; only obey me, and go fetch them for me."

Jacob went and fetched, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made a tasty dish, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took the finest

clothes of Esau, her elder son, which she had in the house, and put them on Jacob, her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids upon his hands and upon the smoothness of his neck. She put into the hands of her son Jacob the savory food and the bread which she had prepared. Then he went to his father and said, "My father."

And he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?"

Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your first-born; I have done as you bade me. Sit up, I beg you, and eat of my game, that you may give me your blessing."

And Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?"

And he said, "Because the Lord, your God, gave me good fortune."

Isaac then said to Jacob, "Come near, my son, that I may feel you, to see whether you are really my son Esau, or not." [8]

And Jacob drew close to his father,

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❧ [8] COME NEAR THAT I MAY FEEL YOU: Why did Isaac doubt Jacob when he brought him food in Esau's place? Because Jacob answered that the Lord had helped him in the hunt. Even though he had been careful to say, "The Lord, your God," Isaac was suspicious, for it was not Esau's way to mention the Lord. Therefore he asked to feel him.

וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אָמוֹ: עָלַי קִלְלָתְךָ בְּנִי, אֲךָ שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי וְלֹךְ קַח-לִי.

who felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy.

And Isaac said, "Serve me, and I will eat of my son's game that I may give you my blessing."

So Jacob brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come close now, and kiss me, my son."

And he came near, and kissed him. And when Isaac smelled his clothing, he blessed him, saying, "The smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed.

"May God give you of the dew of heaven  
And of the fat of the earth,  
And abundance of grain and wine.  
Let peoples serve you,  
And nations bow down to you.  
Be master over your brothers,  
And let your mother's sons bow  
down to you.  
Cursed be everyone who curses you,  
And blessed be everyone who  
blesses you."

No sooner had Isaac finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob scarcely had left the presence of his father, than his brother Esau came in from his hunt. He, too, made tasty food and brought it to his father. And he said, "Let my father arise, and eat some of his son's game, that you may give me your blessing."

And Isaac his father said, "Who are you?"

And he answered, "I am Esau, your first-born."

And Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then who took some game, and brought it to me? I ate heartily of it before you came, and blessed him. Indeed, he shall be blessed!"

When Esau heard his father's words, he burst into loud and bitter cries, and said to his father, "Bless me also, O my father."

But Isaac said, "Your brother came with guile, and has taken your blessing."

And Esau said, "He pushed me aside twice: he took away my birthright, and now he has taken away my blessing. [9] Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

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🔗 [9] HE TOOK AWAY MY BIRTHRIGHT: Both brothers desired the birthright, but for different reasons. Esau was concerned about the double share of inheritance that went with it. Jacob wished it because the priestly service was the right of the first-born.

הַקּוֹל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב, וְהַיָּדִים יְדֵי עֵשָׂו.

And Isaac answered and said, "I have made him master over you, and all his brothers I have made his servants; and I have provided him with grain and wine to sustain him; and what then shall I do for you, my son?"

And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me also, O my father." And Esau wept aloud.

Then Isaac his father said to him,

"The fat places of the earth  
shall be your dwelling,  
And the dew of heaven from  
above.

And by your sword you shall live,  
And you shall serve your brother;  
But when you shall break loose,  
You shall shake his yoke from off  
your neck."

And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him. And Esau said to himself, "The days of the mourning for my father are near. Then I will slay my brother Jacob."

When the words of Esau, her elder

son, were told to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son, Jacob, and said to him, "Your brother Esau consoles himself by planning to kill you. Now, my son, listen well: flee to my brother Laban, at Haran; and stay with him until your brother's anger subsides, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send to fetch you. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?"

And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life, because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman, what good will life be to me?"

So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, "You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and take a wife from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a congregation of peoples."

And Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram.

וְשָׁלַחְתִּי וְלָקַחְתִּיהָ מִשָּׁם; לָמָּה אֲשַׁכֵּל גַּם שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד?



## 8. GENESIS [28-35]

### JACOB'S DREAM

JACOB LEFT BEER-SHEBA and went toward Haran. [1] He came to the place, [2] and stayed there all night, for the sun had set; and he took of the stones of the

place to put under his head, and lay down to sleep.

And he dreamed, and he saw a ladder set up on the earth, its top reached to heaven; and the angels of God ascended and descended on it. [3] Then the Lord

[1] JACOB LEFT BEER-SHEBA: Why does the Bible repeat that Jacob left Beer-sheba? It is emphasizing that when a righteous man leaves a community, his absence is felt. A righteous man is the splendor, beauty and glory of a town; when he leaves, these depart with him.

[2] HE CAME TO THE PLACE: Why is it written that Jacob came to "the" place? the Rabbis asked.

On his journey he came to a resting place for travelers, set up by

וַיַּחֲלֶם: וַהֲיָה סֵלֶם מֵצֵב אֶרֶצָה וְרָאָשׁוּ מִגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה, וַהֲיָה מִלְּאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים  
עוֹלָיִם וְיוֹרְדִים בּוֹ.

stood over him, and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are lying I will give to you and to your descendants. And your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth, [4] and shall spread out to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your descendants shall all the peoples of the earth be blessed. And I will be with you,

and will guard you wherever you go, and will bring you back into this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done what I have promised to you.”

Jacob awoke from his sleep, and he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.”

And he was filled with fear, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

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thoughtful people because there was no inn. The spot was fenced in, as a protection against wild beasts; there were stones for tables and for stools. Here Jacob rested, and slept without fear; and here he had his wonderful dream of the ladder and the angels. When he awoke, he said, “I know now that God is found not only in sanctuaries, but wherever people do good for their fellow man.”

❧ [3] ANGELS ASCENDING AND DESCENDING: The Rabbis pointed out that the angels in Jacob’s dream seemed to originate on earth, since they go up before they come down. It is as though man’s deeds give rise to the angels.

Why did the angels ascend by ladders? The Rabbis pointed out that even angels must ascend to heaven one step at a time.

❧ [4] THE DUST OF THE EARTH: Though it may seem strange, this is a lofty blessing, our Sages said. As the earth, though trampled and buffeted, still produces rich harvests, so the Children of Israel, though oppressed and downtrodden, still survive their oppressors. The Jews have outlived the great empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia and Rome. They have produced wonderful creations of mind and spirit. As long as heaven and earth exist, the Jews shall be the world’s conscience, bringing God’s light to mankind.

מה נזרָא המקום הזה; אין זה כי אם בית אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם.



Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head [5] and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil upon its top. And he called that place Beth-el, the House of God.

And Jacob made this vow, "If God will be with me, and will watch over me on this journey which I am taking, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give a tenth to Thee." [6]

#### JACOB MEETS RACHEL

THEN JACOB LIFTED up his feet [7] and went to the land of the East. He looked about and saw a well in the field, and three flocks of sheep lying nearby, for

the flocks were watered from this well. The stone over the well was very large. Only after all the flocks were gathered there would the stone be rolled off the mouth of the well, and the sheep watered; then the stone was put back upon the mouth of the well.

Jacob said to them, "My friends, where are you from?"

They replied, "We are from Haran."

And he asked, "Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?"

And they said, "We know him."

And he asked of them, "Is it well with him?"

And they answered, "He is well; and see, there is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep."

And Jacob said, "Why, the sun is still high, and it is not yet time for the cattle to be gathered together. Go, water the sheep, and pasture them."

🔗 [5] TOOK THE STONE: Jacob used stones as a pillow, we read, but when he arose after his dream, he took "the" stone. How did the many stones become one? The Rabbis answered that the very stones were jealous of one another, and fought to be the one on which the righteous man rested his head. Rather than let them disturb the tired youth's sleep, God made them into one.

Another explanation is also offered. God had promised Jacob that he would father twelve sons, and that each would become an important tribe. Jacob prayed that the twelve tribes be ever as one, united as brothers and in serving the Lord. In token of God's answer to this prayer, the twelve stones beneath Jacob's head became one.

וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל בֵּית אָבִי - וְהָיָה יְיָ לִי לְאֱלֹהִים.

And they answered, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they [the shepherds] roll the stone off the mouth of the well; and then we will water the sheep."

While he was still talking to them, Rachel came with her father's sheep. And when Jacob saw Rachel, he went near, and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept. And he told her that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

And it came to pass when Laban heard about Jacob that he ran to meet him and embraced him and brought him to his house. And Jacob told Laban his whole story. And Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And Jacob stayed with him for a month.

And Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"

#### LABAN DECEIVES JACOB

NOW LABAN HAD two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was beautiful of form and lovely. And Jacob loved Rachel; so he said to Laban, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter."

And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than to another man. Stay with me."

Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed but a few days, because of his love for her. Then Jacob said, "Give me my betrothed, for my days are fulfilled, and let me marry her."

So Laban gathered all the people of the place, and made a feast. And in the evening, he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to Jacob; and Laban gave Zilpah, his maidservant, to his daughter Leah as a maid.

And in the morning, Jacob discovered

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🔗 [6] A TENTH TO THEE: Jacob was the first man to give a tenth of what he earned to God in a worthy cause. From this example we learn that we must give a tenth of our earnings to charity.

🔗 [7] JACOB LIFTED UP HIS FEET: What is meant by the phrase, "Jacob lifted up his feet"? It indicates that Jacob did not merely walk: he strode. His heart filled with the promise of his dream; he saw new meaning to life. He lifted his feet and strode toward Haran.

וַעֲיִנִי לְאֵה רַכּוֹת, וְרַחֵל הָיְתָה יִפֹּת תָּאֵר וַיִּפֹּת מִרְאָה.

that it was Leah; and he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve you for Rachel? Why, then, have you deceived me?"

And Laban said, "It is not customary in our country to give the younger in marriage before the elder. Finish the week's festivities for this one, and we will give you the other also, in return for another seven years of service with me."

And Jacob did finish the week; and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as wife. And he also gave Bilhah, his maidservant, to Rachel to be her maid.

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served Laban seven years more.

#### JACOB'S CHILDREN

WHEN GOD SAW that Leah was unloved, He gave her children; but Rachel was childless. Leah became pregnant, and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; and she said, "Now my husband will love me."

And she became pregnant again, and bore a son; and said, "Because God saw that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.

And she bore another son; and said, "Now will my husband be attached to me, because I have borne him three

sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.

And she gave birth to a fourth son; and she called his name Judah. And she stopped bearing children.

When Rachel saw that she bore no children to Jacob, she envied her sister, and she said to Jacob, "I want to have children, or else I will die." And Jacob became angry with Rachel, and he said, "Can I take the place of God, who has withheld children from you?"

And she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Marry her, that I may raise up children."

And Jacob took Bilhah. And she became pregnant, and bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice, and has given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan.

And Bilhah, Rachel's maid, became pregnant again, and bore a second son. And Rachel called his name Naphtali.

Then Leah gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob as wife. And Zilpah bore Jacob a son; and Leah called his name Gad. And Zilpah bore Jacob a second son; and Leah called his name Asher.

And God heard Leah, and she became pregnant again; and she bore Jacob a fifth son, and she called his name Issachar. And she became pregnant again, and bore a sixth son to Jacob; and she called his name Zebulun. And afterward

דָּנִי אֱלֹהִים וְגַם שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּתֶּן-לִי בֵן, עַל כֵּן קִרְאַה שְׁמוֹ דָּן.

she bore a daughter, and she called her name Dinah.

And God remembered Rachel, and she became pregnant and bore a son; and she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add another son for me."

#### JACOB FLEES FROM LABAN

JACOB HEARD THE things that Laban's sons were saying: "Jacob has taken away all that our father had; and from that which was our father's he has gotten all his wealth."

And he also saw that Laban's manner to him was not as it had been before. And the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers, and to your place of birth; and I will be with you."

So Jacob called Rachel and Leah to the field and said to them, "I see that your father's manner toward me is not as it was before. You know how hard I worked for your father, but he has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; but God did not allow him to do me any harm. If your father said, 'The speckled animals are to be your wages,' then all the sheep had speckled lambs; and if he said, 'The striped animals are to be your wages,' all the sheep had striped lambs. And I had a dream, and in it the angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' And I said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'I am the God of Beth-el where you

anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, come, leave this land and return to the land of your birth.' "

Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Have we any share or inheritance in our father's house? He has treated us as strangers, for he has sold us and has also kept for himself our price. For all the riches which God has taken away from our father really belong to us and to our children. Now then, do whatever God has told you."

Then Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives upon the camels; and he carried away all his cattle and all his property, and set out to go to Isaac his father, to the land of Canaan.

#### LABAN PURSUES JACOB

ON THE THIRD DAY it was told Laban that Jacob had fled. And Laban took his kinsmen and pursued Jacob a way of seven days; and he overtook him in the mountain of Gilead.

In the night God appeared to Laban, the Aramean, in a dream, and said, "Beware of attempting anything with Jacob."

And Laban caught up with Jacob, and said, "Why did you flee in secret, and carry away my daughters, and rob me? If you had told me you longed for your father's home, I would have sent you off with festive music."

הַשֹּׁמֵר לָךְ פֶּן תִּדְבֹּר עִם יַעֲקֹב מִטּוֹב עַד רָע.

Jacob answered, "Because I was afraid that you would take your daughters from me by force. Now search my camp and take whatever is yours." And Laban searched all the tents but found nothing which belonged to him.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "What is my offense and what is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your sheep; and you have changed my wages ten times."

And Laban answered, "What can I do about my daughters or the children that they have borne? Come then, let us make a covenant."

And Jacob and his men gathered stones and made a heap. And Laban said, "Let this heap be witness that I will not pass over it to you, and that you shall not pass over it to me for harm."

And Laban rose early in the morning, and kissed his daughters and his grandchildren, and left for home. And Jacob continued his journey.

#### JACOB SENDS MESSENGERS TO ESAU

JACOB SENT MESSENGERS before him to Esau his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. And he commanded them, "Thus shall you say to my lord Esau, 'Thus says your servant Jacob: I have sojourned with Laban and stayed

until now. And I have oxen and donkeys and flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord in the hope that I may find favor in your sight.'"

And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is on his way to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. And he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two camps. And he said, "If Esau comes on one camp and attacks it, then the camp which is left may escape."

Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me: 'Return to your country and to your place of birth and I will do you good;' I am not worthy of all the kindness that Thou hast shown Thy servant; for with nothing but my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear that he will come and smite me, as well as the mothers and the children."

And he selected from what he had with him a gift for Esau, his brother: two hundred and twenty goats, two hundred and twenty sheep, and thirty camels, and cattle and donkeys.

כִּי בַמֶּקְלִי עֲבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה, וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשָׂנֵי מַחֲנוֹת.

JACOB WRESTLES WITH AN ANGEL

THE GIFT WENT before him, and he himself spent that night in the camp.

And that night he arose, and took his two wives and his two maidservants and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He also sent everything that belonged to him across the stream.

And Jacob was left alone. Then a man wrestled with him until daybreak. And when he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, so that Jacob's thigh was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking."

But he replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

And he said to him, "What is your name?"

And he replied, "Jacob."

Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel [Contender with God]; [8] because you have struggled with God and with man and have prevailed." [9] And Jacob asked him, "Tell me, I pray, your name."

And he answered, "Why ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel [Face of God], for Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been spared."

And the sun rose upon him, and he limped upon his thigh.

JACOB MEETS ESAU

AND JACOB LIFTED his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came with four hundred men.

⚡ [8] PEOPLE OF ISRAEL: Why are the Jewish people referred to as the "Children of Israel," and never as the "Children of Abraham," or the "Children of Isaac"? Were not all three patriarchs?

The Rabbis pointed out that Abraham was the father of two peoples, the Ishmaelites and the Israelites. Isaac was the ancestor of two peoples, the Edomites and the Israelites. All of Jacob's children, however, and their children's children, were Israelites.

⚡ [9] STRUGGLED WITH GOD: Despite his victory over the angel, Jacob limped off the field. From this we understand that he who struggles with God may survive but he is touched in a vital spot.

לא יַעֲקֹב יֹאמֶר עוֹד שְׁמִי כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעַם אַנְשִׁים וַתּוֹכֵל.

And Jacob bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and they wept.

And Esau lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and he said, "Who are these with you?" And Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given to your servant."

And Esau said, "What do you mean by all this camp I met?" And Jacob said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." And Esau said, "I have enough, my brother. Let that which you have be yours." But Jacob urged him and he took it.

So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

#### BENJAMIN IS BORN

AND THEY JOURNEYED from Beth-el; and Rachel was in childbirth, and she had

hard labor. When her labor was at its hardest her midwife said to her, "Fear not, for you have another son!"

But as she was breathing her last—for she died—she named her son Ben-oni [the "son of my sorrow"]; but his father called him Benjamin [the "son of the right" hand].

And Rachel died, and was buried on the road to Ephrath, which is now Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a monument upon her grave, the same monument that is on Rachel's grave to this day.

#### THE DEATH OF ISAAC

AND JACOB CAME to his father Isaac at Mamre—that is Hebron—where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. Now the days of Isaac were a hundred and eighty years.

And Isaac died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.

וַיְהִי בְצֵאת נִפְשָׁהּ כִּי מָתָה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן-אוֹנִי, וְאָבִיו קָרָא לוֹ בְּנִימִין.



## 9. GENESIS [37-41]

### JOSEPH'S DREAM

THESE ARE THE generations of Jacob. Joseph was seventeen years old. [1] He was still a boy and was tending the flock

with his brothers. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his other children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors. [2] And when his

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[1] JOSEPH WAS SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD: Why do the generations of Jacob begin with Joseph, although Jacob had eleven other sons?

Joseph was the cause of all that later happened to Jacob and to the Jewish people. Because he was sold as a slave and brought to Egypt, the descendants of Jacob became a nation, worthy of being freed and of receiving the Torah.

[2] A COAT OF MANY COLORS: This story teaches that a father should not favor one child over another, Rabbi Eleazar pointed out. Joseph's

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בָּנָיו כִּי בֶן־זְקֻנִּים הוּא לוֹ, וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים.



brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

And Joseph dreamed a dream and he told it to his brothers: "Hear this dream which I dreamed: We were binding sheaves in the field, and my sheaf arose and stood upright, and your sheaves gathered and bowed to my sheaf."

And his brothers said to him, "Would you rule over us?" And they hated him all the more for his dreams and for his words.

Then he had another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "I have dreamed another dream: I saw the sun and the moon and eleven stars bow down to me."

When he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Am I and your mother and your brothers come to bow before you?"

While his brothers were jealous of him, his father kept this matter in mind.

#### THE BROTHERS SELL JOSEPH

HIS BROTHERS WENT to pasture their

father's flocks at Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Go now, see whether it is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring me back word."

So Joseph went out from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. A man found him wandering in the field and asked him, "What do you seek?"

And he said, "I seek my brothers. Tell me please where they are pasturing."

The man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard them say: Let us go to Dothan."

So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them in Dothan. And they saw him in the distance, and before he came near them they plotted to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes the dreamer. Let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits, and we will say a wild beast devoured him. Then we shall see what will become of his dreams."

But Reuben heard them and tried to save Joseph from their hand, and said, "Do not shed blood. Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but do not lay hand upon him," so that he might save him from their hand and restore him to his father.

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coat did not weigh more than two *selas*, and it could be held in the palm of the hand; but this trifle caused the exile of the Children of Israel into Egypt.

אֶל תִּשְׁפְּכוּ דָם. הַשְׁלִיכוּ אוֹתוֹ אֶל הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבָּר וְיָד אֶל תִּשְׁלְחוּ בּוֹ.

When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his coat of many colors, and they took him and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat bread; [3] and they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels laden with spices and balm, on their way to Egypt. And Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we

kill our brother and conceal his murder? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay hand on him; for he is our brother." And his brothers agreed.

They pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who brought him to Egypt. [4]

The brothers took Joseph's coat, and killed a he-goat, and dipped the coat in the blood; [5] and they brought it to

🔗 [3] JOSEPH IN THE PIT: After the brothers had thrown Joseph into the pit, they sat down to eat. Joseph cried to them to free him, but they moved away so as not to hear. When they were about to bless God for their meal, they paused in realization. "How can we thank God while we are putting our brother to death?" They immediately pulled Joseph out of the pit, but now they feared he would report their misdeeds to their father. When a caravan of Midianites passed by, Judah suggested that they sell the boy, rather than shed his blood.

🔗 [4] WHO SOLD JOSEPH? Some of our Rabbis believed that the brothers did not sell Joseph, but meant only to frighten him. While they were eating, however, passing Midianites carried Joseph away and sold him to the Ishmaelites. This explains why Joseph said years later, "For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews."

Our Rabbis declare further that when Joseph told his brothers, "You sold me here," he meant, "Because you threw me into the pit, I was sold here. You were as direct a cause as if you yourselves had sold me."

🔗 [5] A LIE PRODUCES A LIE: After the brothers had sold Joseph, Reuben returned, planning to release him. To his horror, he found the pit

מָה בָּצַע כִּי נִהְרַג אֶת אֶחָיו וְכָסִינוּ אֶת דָּמוֹ? לָכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ לַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים וַיִּדְנוּ  
אֶל תְּהִי בּוֹ כִּי אֶחָיו בְּשִׁירָנוּ הוּא.

their father. They said, "We have found this. See whether it is your son's coat or not." And he recognized it, and said, "It is my son's coat; a wild beast has devoured Joseph."

And Jacob rent his garments, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted; and he said, "I will go down to the grave to my son mourning."

#### JOSEPH IN EGYPT

JOSEPH WAS BROUGHT down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, bought him from the Ishmaelites.

And Joseph lived in the house of his master, the Egyptian, and the Lord was with Joseph and made all that he did prosper under his hand. When his mas-

ter saw that the Lord was with him, [6] and that the Lord made everything that he did prosper, Joseph found favor in his sight, and he made him overseer of his house.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking, and his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, "Love me!" [7] Joseph refused, and said to her, "My master trusts me. You are his wife. How can I commit this great wickedness and sin against God?"

She spoke to him day after day, but he did not listen to her. One day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was at home, she caught him by his coat, saying, "Stay with me."

Joseph left his coat in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had fled, she called to the men

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empty. When he learned what the others had done, Reuben was beside himself with anguish. "How could you have done this?" he asked. "I had thought but to frighten him, not to sell him! What shall we tell our father?"

When the brothers realized that they would have to face their father with the terrible news, they set out after the Midianites. "We will buy him back, or take him by force," they said. But they searched for days, and could not find the traders.

"We must tell our father that a wild beast devoured Joseph," they said. "Woe to him who reveals the truth! We must live with this lie all our days."

וַיִּמְאֵן לְהַתְּנֵחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר: כִּי אֵרָד אֶל בְּנֵי אָבִל שְׂאוּלָה.

of her house, and said, "See, my master has brought in a Hebrew to insult us; he came in to make love to me and I cried out loudly, so that he left his garment with me and fled outdoors."

And she kept his coat by her until Joseph's master came home. Then she told him the same story: "The Hebrew

slave, whom you have brought to us, came in to insult me. But when I screamed for help he fled, leaving his garment with me."

Joseph's master became wrathful. And he took Joseph and put him in prison, where the king's prisoners were kept.

But the Lord was with Joseph and

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☞ [6] THE LORD WAS WITH HIM: Potiphar observed that Joseph prayed three times a day. "What are you doing?" the Egyptian asked. "Are you trying to cast a spell on me?"

"No," answered Joseph, "I am praying to God."

"To God?" asked Potiphar. "Who is your God? Show him to me."

Replied Joseph, "Would my master please look up at the sun while I count to a hundred?"

Potiphar gazed at the sun for a few moments, then closed his eyes and turned away. "No man can look at the sun for any length of time," he said.

"If you cannot look at the sun, which is only one of His many works, how can you look at God Himself—at the Creator of heaven and earth, of the sun and the planets, and of all that is in the world!"

☞ [7] THE SELF-SATISFIED YOUNG MAN: When Potiphar saw that God was with Joseph, he put him in charge of his entire household. Joseph was in command both in the field and in the house. Soon he was enjoying his power and his comfort. He began to curl his hair and to dress elegantly after the Egyptian fashion. He forgot about his grieving father.

God observed, and said, "Your father mourns you in sackcloth and ashes, while you preen in your finery. I will send a tigress after you." Then did Zuleika, Potiphar's wife, begin to cast her eyes on the handsome young slave.

אָבִיךָ מִתְאַבֵּל עָלֶיךָ בְּשֵׁק וְאַפֶּר, וְאַתָּה אוֹכֵל וְשׁוֹתָה וּמְסַלֵּס בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ.

showed kindness to him and gave him favor with the chief jailer. The jailer put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. The jailer did not attend to anything because the Lord was with Joseph and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.

#### THE CUPBEARER AND BAKER OF PHARAOH

IT CAME TO PASS that the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king. And Pharaoh was enraged at his two officers, and he put them in the prison where Joseph was confined. And the captain of the guard assigned Joseph to them, and they were in custody some time.

And they dreamed a dream, both of them, the cupbearer and the baker, on the same night. When Joseph came to them in the morning he saw that they were worried. And he asked the two imprisoned officers, "Why do you look so sad today?"

And they said to him, "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no one that can interpret it." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, I pray you."

The cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said, "In my dream I saw a vine before me, and on the vine were

three branches; and as soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth and immediately its clusters ripened into grapes. And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand."

And Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation: the three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will restore you to your position; and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as you did when you were his cupbearer.

"But keep me in mind when it shall be well with you, and show kindness to me, I pray you, and mention me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that I should be put into the dungeon."

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream. I saw three wicker baskets on my head, and in the top basket there was every kind of baked goods for Pharaoh, and birds were eating them out of the basket which was on my head."

And Joseph answered and said, "This is the interpretation: the three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh shall hang you on a tree, and the birds shall eat your flesh."

כִּי גָנַב גִּנְבֹתַי מֵאֶרֶץ הָעִבְרִים וְגַם פֹּה לֹא עָשִׂיתִי מְאוּמָה כִּי שָׁמוּ אוֹתִי בַּבּוֹר.

And on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants. And he restored the cupbearer to his office, so that he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. [8]

The cupbearer, however, did not keep Joseph in mind, but forgot him.

#### PHARAOH'S DREAM

AND IT CAME to pass two years later that Pharaoh dreamed that he stood by the Nile. And there came up out of the river seven beautiful, fat cows, and they fed in the reed-grass. And then seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and lean, and stood by the other cows upon the bank of the Nile. And the ugly and lean cows ate up the seven beautiful and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke.

And he slept and dreamed a second

time: seven fine, good ears of grain came up on one stalk. And after them sprouted seven other ears, thin and blasted by the east wind. And the thin ears swallowed up the fine, full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream.

In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men and he told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them.

Then the cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "My sins I now recall. Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me and the chief baker in the prison of the captain of the guard. We had a dream on the same night, I and he. And there was a young Hebrew, a slave of the captain, and we told him our dreams and he interpreted them. And exactly as he interpreted them to us, so they came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the baker was hanged."

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🌀 [8] CUPBEARER YES, BAKER NO! Why was the cupbearer forgiven, but the baker hanged? Both had seemed lax in their duties. The cupbearer had handed Pharaoh a goblet of wine with a fly in it. The baker had delivered bread with splinters of wood in it.

Pharaoh's counselors reasoned: "The cupbearer could have poured the wine carefully into a clean cup, but the fly flew in as he had handed it to his master. The baker was negligent, for if he had sifted the flour carefully, he would have removed the splinters." Therefore, the baker was hanged while the cupbearer resumed his duties.

וַיְהִי כִּבְאֶשֶׁר פָּתַר לָנוּ כֵּן הָיָה: אוֹתֵי הַשִּׁיב עַל כִּנֵּי וְאוֹתוֹ תִּלְהֶ.

Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they brought him hurriedly out of the dungeon. And he shaved himself and changed his clothing, and he came to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one that can interpret it. Now I have heard it said that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

And Pharaoh told his dreams to Joseph. [9]

And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh is one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. There are coming seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. And there shall be after them seven years of famine, and all the plenty shall be forgotten; famine will devastate

the land. The dream was twice shown to Pharaoh, because the thing is decreed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass. Therefore let Pharaoh seek out a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint overseers over the land. And let them gather all the food of these good years to come, and lay up grain under the hand of Pharaoh, and keep the food in cities. It shall serve as a store against the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish because of the famine."

#### JOSEPH IS MADE GOVERNOR OF EGYPT

THE PLAN PLEASED Pharaoh and all his servants. So Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man with the spirit of

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❧ [9] AND PHARAOH TOLD HIS DREAMS: Pharaoh described his dream twice: once to his magicians and once to Joseph. The second telling has many more details.

Nachmanides held that Pharaoh did not realize the importance of these details (such as, the lean cows not getting fatter after eating the fat cows) until he recounted it to Joseph.

Similarly, a great painting or magnificent symphony may mean nothing to an uninformed person. In the company of a man of spirit and understanding, even before he has been given an explanation, he begins to get hints of what is important.

בְּלִעְדִּי, אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה אֶת שְׁלוֹם פַּרְעֹה.

God in him like this one?" And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge over my house, and according to your word all my people shall be ruled; only in respect to the throne itself will I be greater than you. I have appointed you over all the land of Egypt." [10]

And Pharaoh took off his signet ring and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. And he

made him ride in the second chariot, and they cried before him, "Kneel!"

And Pharaoh gave him a wife, Asenath, the daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh.

Then Joseph went throughout all the land of Egypt. And he gathered up all the food of the seven good years which were in the land of Egypt, and stored the food in the cities. And Joseph stored up grain as the sand of the sea, until they gave up counting it.

🔗 [10] VICTORY TO PHARAOH: Why did Pharaoh appoint as viceroy a Hebrew youth, fresh from prison, a slave who had displeased his master? Surely the great Pharaoh had officers of nobler lineage and greater experience?

The worried Pharaoh had asked his soothsayers and magicians to explain his dreams. Their interpretations were many and fantastic. One declared that Pharaoh would have seven daughters who would marry seven brothers; the daughters would all die, and the brothers would rebel against Pharaoh. Another proclaimed that the king would have seven wives, each of whom would die young, leaving a child who would rebel against him.

What most angered Pharaoh was that each magician claimed that he alone could prevent disaster. Pharaoh recognized that their interpretations were ruses to gain power for themselves.

By contrast, Joseph's interpretation was reasonable, and his plan to avert years of famine was clear. He did not offer himself as the man to administer the plan, but suggested that Pharaoh choose a wise man to direct it. Joseph's wisdom and his modesty appealed to Pharaoh, who made him second in the realm.

אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֶת כָּל זֹאת, אֵין נָבוֹן וְחָכָם כָּמוֹךָ. אַתָּה תִּהְיֶה  
עַל בֵּיתִי וְעַל פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל עַמִּי.



To Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came. And Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, which means “making to forget”: for “God has made me forget all my hardship, and all my father’s house.” The second he called Ephraim, which means “to be fruitful”: for “God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortune.”

And the seven years of plenty that were in the land of Egypt came to an end. And the seven years of famine began, as Joseph had said. And there was famine in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

Moreover, all the world came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

וְכָל הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ מִצְרַיִם לְשֹׁכֵר אֶל יוֹסֵף, כִּי חֲזַק הָרָעָב בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ.



## 10. GENESIS [42-45]

### JOSEPH'S BROTHERS COME TO EGYPT

NOW JACOB SAW that there was grain in Egypt, and he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another? I have heard

that there is grain in Egypt. [1] Go down and buy food for us, that we may live and not die."

And Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. [2] But Jacob did

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[1] GRAIN IN EGYPT: Although Joseph was selling the stored grain at a good price and turning the money over to the king's treasury, Pharaoh had visions of empty granaries and of starvation in his own palace. He ordered Joseph not to sell grain, so that he and the royal household would have plenty, even though the rest of Egypt starved.

Joseph showed him the many store-cities he had built, holding grain enough for all the people for seven long years. In consequence, Joseph was permitted to sell rations to those in need, and the people loved him, and blessed him.

רְדוּ שְׂמָה וְשִׁבְרוּ לָנוּ מִשֶּׁם וְנִחֲיָה וְלֹא נָמוּת.

not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers lest harm befall him. And the sons of Israel came among others to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

Joseph was the governor over the land, and it was he who sold the grain to the people. [3] And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the earth. [4] When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but acted

as though he were a stranger to them, and spoke harshly to them, "Where do you come from?"

And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and he said to them, "You are spies. You came to see the nakedness of the land."

And they said to him, "No, my lord, your servants came to buy food. We are

🔔 [2] JOSEPH'S TEN BROTHERS: Why does Scripture refer to "Joseph's ten brothers" instead of to "Jacob's ten sons"? The Rabbis read the phrase as indication that the brothers were filled with remorse, and that they set out to search for Joseph in Egypt. They intended to offer ransom for him, and, if refused, to take him by force, at the risk of their lives.

🔔 [3] JOSEPH WAS GOVERNOR: After he was made governor, why did not Joseph send word to his aged father, who still grieved for him?

Joseph did send messengers to Jacob, we are told, but they could not find him, for Jacob and his family were nomads who wandered from place to place with their herds.

🔔 [4] JOSEPH'S BROTHERS CAME: Why did Jacob send ten sons to Egypt? Surely a smaller number, accompanied by servants, would have been sufficient.

The cause was Joseph who, unable to locate his father and brothers, decided to let them find him. He sent word over all the trade routes that servants of foreigners were forbidden to buy grain in Egypt during the famine. Only free men might come, each with one donkey. Therefore, when Jacob needed food for his family, he found it necessary to send ten sons to carry back food enough.

וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת אֶחָיו וַיְכַיֵּרֵם וַיַּתְנַכֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם קָשׁוֹת.

all one man's sons. We are honest men, not spies."

And Joseph said to them, "No, you came but to see the nakedness of the land."

And they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and the youngest is today with our father, and one is no more."

But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said: you are spies! By this shall you be tested: [5] as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you and let him bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in custody, so that the truth of your word may be proved. Else,

as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies." And he put them all together in prison for three days.

On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you shall live, for I fear God. If you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain in prison; but the rest of you go, carry grain home for your starved households. But bring your youngest brother to me so that your words shall be verified, and you shall not die."

And they said to one another, "Truly, we are guilty about our brother in that we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us for mercy, and we would not hear. Therefore this distress has come upon us."

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🔗 [5] YOU SHALL BE TESTED! The text repeats that Joseph recognized his brothers when they came to Egypt. Why did he not reveal himself to them?

When they bent low before him, Joseph was reminded of his childhood dreams in which they bowed before him. He also remembered how he had begged in vain for mercy when he was thrown into the pit. Were they still so cruel, he asked himself? Had they harmed Benjamin, out of hatred for him? Was his father still alive? He awaited answers to these questions before revealing himself.

Moreover, Joseph had a sense of destiny, a belief that he was in Egypt as part of God's plan. Otherwise, the dedication of his ancestor, Abraham, would have been in vain. Would the Children of Israel persist as a spiritual force, or would they be no more than a tribe of quarrelsome brothers?

All this he would test and see.

אָבֶל אֱשָׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ עַל אָחִינוּ, אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוֹ אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא שָׁמַעְנוּ.

And Reuben said to them, "Did I not say to you: Do not sin against the boy? But you would not listen."

They did not know that Joseph understood them, for he had an interpreter between them. [6]

He turned away from them and wept; but he returned to them and spoke to them, and took Simeon and bound him before their eyes. Then Joseph gave orders to fill their sacks with grain, and to return each one's money into his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey; and this was done for them. And they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed.

When they camped, one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder, and saw his money in the mouth of the sack. And he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned. See, it is here inside my sack."

And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling one to another, and

said, "What is this that God has done to us?"

#### THE BROTHERS RETURN TO CANAAN

THEY CAME TO Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, and they told him all that had befallen them.

And when they emptied their sacks, they found each man's money in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were frightened.

And Jacob their father said, "You have bereaved me. Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin away."

Then Reuben said to his father, "You may slay my two sons if I do not bring him to you. [7] Put him in my charge, and I will bring him back to you."

And Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he only is left. If harm befalls him on the journey that you take, then you

❧ [6] THE INTERPRETER: According to the Midrash, the interpreter was Joseph's elder son, Manasseh. Although born and reared in Egypt, the youth had been taught the language and traditions of his ancestors. Despite the fact that they were the only Israelites in Egypt, Joseph's family maintained their identity.

❧ [7] SLAY MY TWO SONS: Though Reuben meant well, he was not the wisest of the brothers. When he suggested that Jacob kill Reuben's two sons if Benjamin did not return, Jacob might have retorted, "It is

לֹא יֵרֵד בְּנֵי עִמְכֶם, כִּי אֶחָיו מֵת וְהוּא לְבִדּוֹ נִשְׁאַר.

will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

But the famine was very severe in the land. And when they had eaten up the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, and buy us a little food."

And Judah said to him, "The man warned us, saying: Do not see my face unless your brother is with you. If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; but if you will not send him, we will not go down."

And Judah said to his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and our little ones. [8] I will be surety for him; hold me responsible. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, let me bear the blame forever."

And Israel their father said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a gift to the man, some balm, some honey, spices, pistachio nuts and almonds. And take double the money in your hands, because the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks might have been an oversight. Take your brother, too, and go and return to the man. And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am to be bereaved of my children, I shall be bereaved."

#### THE BROTHERS' SECOND VISIT TO EGYPT

THE MEN TOOK the gifts, and they took

a wild and foolish scheme! Joseph and Simeon are already lost to me. If disaster befalls Benjamin, will I be happier for slaying my grandchildren as well?" But he replied only, "My son shall not go down with you."

As the verse says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly" (Proverbs 26:4).

🔗 [8] SEND THE LAD WITH ME: The Midrash says that Judah's main argument was, "Father, we cannot foresee what may befall Benjamin. However, we know that if we do not go to Egypt, you and I and all our little ones will perish of hunger. Is it not better to risk one soul than to abandon all?"

קָחוּ מִזֶּמֶרֶת הָאָרֶץ בְּכֻלֵּיכֶם וְהוֹרִידוּ לְאִישׁ מִנְחָה: מַעֲט צָרִי וּמַעֲט דָּבֶשׁ, וְכֹאֵת וְלֵט, בְּטָגִים וּשְׁקָדִים.

double money in their hands, and Benjamin; and they rose up and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house and prepare meat, for the men shall eat with me at noon." And the man did as Joseph bade.

When Joseph came home, they brought him the gifts in their hands and bowed down to him to the ground. And he asked of their health, and said, "Is your father well? The old man of whom you spoke, is he still living?"

And they said, "Your servant, our father, is well. He is still alive." And they bowed their heads in obeisance.

And Joseph looked up and saw Benjamin his brother, his mother's son, and asked, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said to him, "May God be gracious unto you, my son."

And Joseph hastily sought a place to weep, for his heart yearned toward his brother; so he went to his chamber, and wept there. And he washed his face and came out, and he controlled himself, and said, "Set out bread."

They were seated in his presence according to their age; the first-born according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked at each other in astonishment.

Portions were taken to them from his table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

Then he commanded his house steward, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. And put my silver goblet in the mouth of the sack of the youngest." And he did as Joseph had told him.

When the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. And when they were gone out of the city and were not yet far, Joseph said to his steward, "Quick! go after the men! And when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? It is the cup from which my lord drinks. You have done an evil thing.'"

So he overtook them, and he spoke these words to them. And they said to him, "Why does my lord speak such things? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! Behold, the money which we found in our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then should we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? If it is found on one of your servants, he shall die, and the rest of us will become slaves to your lord."

And he said, "Although it should indeed be as you say, yet only the one in whose possession it is found shall be-

וַיִּמָּהֵר יוֹסֵף כִּי נִכְמְרוּ רִחְמָיו אֶל אָחִיו וַיִּבְקֶשׁ לְבָכּוֹת.

come a slave; but the rest of you shall be blameless."

Then each one hastily lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. And he searched, beginning with the eldest and finishing with the youngest; and the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they rent their clothes, and every man reloaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and they fell before him on the ground. And Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done?"

And Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has discovered the iniquity of your servants. We are our lord's slaves, both we and he in whose hand the goblet was found."

But Joseph said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the goblet was found shall be my slave; but as for the rest of you, go in peace to your father."

#### JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF

THEN JUDAH CAME near to him, and said, "Oh, my lord, [9] let your servant, I pray you, speak a word in the ears of my lord, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants: Have you a father or a brother? And we said to my lord: We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him. But you said to your servant:

❧ [9] "BE, ADONI"—OH, MY LORD: When did Joseph decide to reveal himself? When Judah cried, "Oh, my lord!" Joseph understood that the Hebrew phrase could mean, "Me, my lord." Judah was saying, "Take me instead of Benjamin! If you need a soldier, I am the stronger. If you wish a servant to draw water, or to work in the fields, or to do any work whatever, I am better suited than the frail Benjamin."

This was precisely what Joseph had been waiting to hear. Until this moment, he had no knowledge that his brothers had changed; but now they did not try to save themselves at Benjamin's expense, even though it appeared that he had brought trouble upon them. Judah offered his freedom and, if need be, his very life for his brother.

Now Joseph made himself known to the brothers he knew to be worthy.

וַיֵּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר: בִּי אֲדֹנָי, יִדְבָּר-נָא עִבְדְּךָ דָּבָר בְּאָזְנֵי אֲדֹנָי.



Bring him down to me that I may set eyes upon him. But we said to my lord: The lad cannot leave his father; for if he should leave his father would die. And you said: Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again. When we returned to our father, we told him the words of my lord.

"Our father said: Go again and buy us a little food. But we said: We cannot go unless our youngest brother be with us. Now if I come to your servant, my father, without the lad, in whose life his life is bound up, when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die. And your servants will bring down the gray hairs of our father with sorrow to the grave.

"And your servant became surety for the lad to my father. Therefore, let your servant, I pray you, remain in the lad's place, a slave to my lord; but let the lad go back with his brothers. For how shall I go back to my father if the lad is not with me, and witness the sorrow that will come upon my father?"

Joseph could not control himself before his attendants, and he cried, "Let everyone go out from here!" And so there was no one else present with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers.

And he wept aloud and he said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father yet alive?"

And his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they to see him. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, I pray you."

And they came near and he said, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be distressed nor reproach yourselves that you sold me, for God sent me before you to preserve life. God sent me before you to insure you a remnant on earth and to save your lives in a great deliverance. It was not you who sent me here, but God.

"Hasten and go to my father, and say to him, 'Thus speaks your son, Joseph: God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, without delay. You shall live in the land of Goshen, and be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. And I will provide for you.' And you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt and of all that you have seen, and you shall hasten to bring my father here."

And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept.

אֲנִי יוֹסֵף. הֲעוֹד אָבִי חַי?



## 11. GENESIS [45-50]

### JACOB LEARNS THAT JOSEPH IS ALIVE

THE NEWS WAS heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come, and Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers: Do this, load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan; and take your father and your households and come to me; and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall eat the fat of the land. Now you are commanded to do this: Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Do not worry about

your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours."

So Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh commanded, and supplied them with provisions for the journey. To each of them he gave changes of clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothing. And to his father he sent ten donkeys laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten laden with grain and bread and provisions for his father's journey.

And he said to them, "See that you do not quarrel on the way!"

So he sent his brothers away, and they

וּלְאֲבִיו שָׁלַח כִּזְאֵת עֶשְׂרֵה חֲמֹרִים נוֹשְׂאִים מְטוֹב מִצֵּרִים וְעֶשֶׂר אֲתוֹנוֹת נוֹשְׂאוֹת  
בָּר וְלֶחֶם וּמִזֹּן לְאֲבִיו לַדֶּרֶךְ.

went up from Egypt and came to the land of Canaan, to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying, "Joseph is yet alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." [1]

And his heart stood still, for he did not believe them. But when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived.

"Enough," said Israel. "Joseph my son is still alive! I will go and see him before I die." [2]

#### JACOB'S JOURNEY TO EGYPT

ISRAEL SET OUT on his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel

🔥 [1] THE BROTHERS RETURN: When the brothers returned to Canaan, they reported to Jacob that Joseph was alive and ruler over all Egypt. They told of his importance and influence, his titles and honor, his servants and his wealth; but this was not of concern to Jacob.

"What of his good works," his father asked, "his charity and his good name?"

"There is none to equal him in all Egypt for good deeds and charity," they immediately said. "He gives generously to the needy, the widowed and the orphaned. He protects the weak and restores justice to the wronged. His kindnesses have made his name blessed."

Jacob rose, looked heavenward, and prayed, "Praised be the Lord who strengthened my son Joseph in his time of trouble, and caused him to live according to His Torah of lovingkindness."

🔥 [2] JACOB'S HAPPINESS: Jacob celebrated his happiness with a great banquet for his sons and their households. Canaanites, too, came to congratulate them on the good news. "When Joseph was lost to me many years ago," Jacob told them, "I mourned and would not be comforted. In my heart I said: God has embittered my life.

"Now I have learned not only that my son lives, but that he is governor over all of Egypt, and is known for his charity and good works. God is righteous and faithful: that which seems evil to us, He turns for good. May His great Name be blessed!"

רַב, עוֹד יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי חַי; אֵלֶיכָה וְאַרְאֶנּוּ בְּטָרֵם אָמוּת.

in a vision by night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob!"

And he answered, "Here I am."

And He said to Israel, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down into Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt; and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes."

Then Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father and their little ones and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And they took their cattle and their goods which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his children with him. All the souls belonging to Jacob that came into Egypt were sixty-six. And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two; all who came into Egypt were seventy. [3]

And he sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to show him the way to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.

And Joseph ordered his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father; and he presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept a long time. Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I can die, since I have seen your face, that you are yet alive."

#### JACOB BEFORE PHARAOH

THEN JOSEPH WENT in and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers, and their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and they are in the land of Goshen."

And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?"

❧ [3] THE SEVENTY: Jacob was troubled when he learned that Joseph wished him to go down into Egypt, and there to reside. "Shall I leave the land of my ancestors, the Holy Land, where the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, is in every valley and field, to go to an unclean land, where men worship idols and do not fear God?"

Then God spoke, "I will go with you to Egypt."

It is written: "All who came into Egypt were seventy." Yet at the border of Egypt, when the males of Jacob's family were counted, they were found to number only sixty-nine, including Joseph and his two sons. The seventieth was the Almighty.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל יוֹסֵף: אֲמוֹתָהּ הַפַּעַם אַחֲרֵי רְאוֹתִי אֶת פְּנֶיךָ כִּי עוֹדֶךָ הִי.

And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers. And we have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, since the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Therefore, we pray you, let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."

And Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Now that your father and your brothers have come to you, let them live in the best part of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my cattle."

Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and presented him to Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How old are you?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojournings are a hundred and thirty years. Few and hard were the years of my life, and they have not reached the years of my fathers in their sojournings." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and left Pharaoh's presence.

Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided for his father, his brothers and all his father's household.

And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the province of Goshen; and they were fruitful and became very numerous.

#### THE DEATH OF JACOB

JACOB LIVED IN the land of Egypt seventeen years. And when the time drew near for Israel to die, he called his son Joseph, and said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, I pray you, show kindness and faithfulness to me, and do not bury me in Egypt. When I lie down with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial-place. When I was coming from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan, some distance from Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath—now Beth-lehem."

And Joseph said, "I will do as you have said."

And Jacob said, "Swear to me."

And Joseph gave him his oath. And Israel settled back on the head of his bed.

Now Israel's eyes were so dim with age that he could not see. And Joseph brought his two sons to his father, and when Israel saw them, he said, "Who are these?" [4]

And Joseph said to his father, "They

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וַיְבֹרֵךְ [4] WHO ARE THESE? Joseph brought his sons to his father that he might bless them. When they entered, Jacob saw two boys dressed as

are my sons, whom God has given me here."

And Israel said, "Bring them to me that I may bless them."

Then Joseph brought them near to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face, but God has let me see your children also."

And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the first-born. When Joseph saw that his father was laying his right hand upon the head of Ephraim it displeased him, and he raised his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father,

"Not so, my father, for this is the first-born. Put your right hand upon his head."

But his father refused, and said, "I know it, my son, I know it. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; however his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

And Jacob blessed Joseph's children, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long unto this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and in them let my name be recalled and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

Egyptians and speaking together in the Egyptian tongue. "Who are these?" Jacob asked. "They are not ours and should not receive my blessing."

"Father, they are my sons," Joseph answered. "They appear strange in your eyes because they were born and reared in Egypt, but they are true descendants of Abraham, worthy of your blessing."

This did not satisfy his father. "You did not marry one of our kin. Were you wed according to the laws and customs of our people?" Jacob asked.

In reply, Joseph brought his wife, Asenath, to Jacob, and showed him their marriage contract, the *k'tubah*. "Father, this is my wife, whom I married according to our laws and traditions, with a marriage contract and proper ceremony. Bless my sons, I beg you, if only for the sake of this pious woman."

הַמְּלֹאךְ הַגּוֹיִל אוֹתִי מִכָּל רָע, יְבָרֶךְ אֶת הַנְּעָרִים, וַיִּקְרָא בָהֶם שְׁמֵי אֲבוֹתַי,  
אֲבֵרָהֶם וַיְצַחֲקוּ.

And Jacob called in all his sons and blessed them. [5] And he charged them, saying, "I am to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought from Ephron, the Hittite, for a burial-place. [6] There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; and there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah."

When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and expired, and was gathered to his people.

And Joseph fell upon his father's face and wept upon him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father. And the physicians embalmed Israel.

And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph went up to bury his father in the land of Canaan. And with him went up all the officials of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all

the elders of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph and his brothers, and his father's household.

#### THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

AND JOSEPH RETURNED into Egypt after he had buried his father, he and his brothers, and all who went up with him to bury his father.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us, and will pay us back all the evil which we did him." And they sent a message to him, saying: "Your father commanded before he died, saying, 'This you shall say to Joseph: Forgive now the wickedness and the sin of your brothers for the evil they did to you.'"

And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers fell down before him; and they said, "Here, we are your bondmen."

And Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? You

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🕒 [5] JACOB SUMMONED HIS SONS: When Jacob's end was near, he called his sons together. They assembled about his bed for his blessing. Before he would bless them, the aged patriarch was obliged to ask, "Have you, my sons, been tempted by the animal gods of Egypt to forsake the God of Israel?"

With one voice they replied, "Hear, O Israel [our father], the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף: אֵל תִּירָאוּ, כִּי הִתַּחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנִי?

meant to do me harm, but God meant it for good, in order to save the lives of many people. Now therefore do not be afraid; I will provide for you, and for your little ones." And he comforted them, and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph dwelt in the land of Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. And he lived to see his sons' children of the third generation.

And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am

about to die; but God will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land unto the land which He promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

And Joseph then took an oath from the sons of Israel: "When God will remember you, you shall carry up my bones with you from here."

So Joseph died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

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❧ [6] BURY ME WITH MY FATHERS: Despite the fact that he did not grant the same favor to Rachel, Jacob requested that he be buried in the Cave of Machpelah. Why had he been so indifferent to the last resting place of Rachel, whom he had loved the most?

The Midrash tells us that it was God who commanded Jacob to bury Rachel on the road to Beth-lehem, along which the Jewish people would pass, centuries later, as they went into exile. Then would the matriarch Rachel have compassion on her people, as Jeremiah prophesied: "A voice is heard on high, the sound of weeping—Rachel weeping for her children" (31:15).

וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה – אֱלֹהִים חֲשַׁבָה לְטוֹבָהּ.







## 12. EXODUS [1-4]

### THE OPPRESSION OF THE ISRAELITES IN EGYPT

JOSEPH DIED, AND all his brothers, and all that generation. [1] And the Children of Israel multiplied and increased greatly

and grew mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. And he said to his people, "The people of the Children of Israel are too many and too

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[1] AND ALL THAT GENERATION: Why did the Egyptians come to despise the Children of Israel?

The change came about when Jacob's sons died and their descendants began to ape the ways of the Egyptians. They thronged to the shrines of the animal gods of Egypt, forsook their own traditions, and became a people without a heritage. Then the Egyptians' goodwill turned to hate, and Pharaoh said, "Come, let us deal wisely with them!"

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף.

mighty for us. Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they become so numerous that if a war comes, they will join with our enemies and fight against us, and go out of the land."

Therefore they set over them taskmasters to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pit-hom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more numerous they

multiplied and the more they spread out. And the Egyptians made their lives bitter with hard labor, in mortar and in brick and in all kinds of work in the field. [2]

#### PHARAOH COMMANDS TO KILL ALL NEWBORN BOYS

THEN THE KING of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, and he said, "When

✎ [2] BITTER WITH HARD LABOR: The Egyptians deliberately tried to break the spirit of the Children of Israel by making them humiliate each other. Each Egyptian taskmaster had under his command ten Israelite foremen. Each foreman had to see that his group of ten slaves fulfilled the prescribed day's work, or he was cruelly whipped. As a result, the foremen drove their men and beat them, in order to complete their quota. This system was intended to divide the Hebrews and to make them hate each other.

Often the Egyptians forced the Israelite foremen to put too heavy a load on the young, or to compel a woman or an old man to carry the load of a young, strong man. They humiliated a man by making him do women's work.

When the day's work was done, the taskmasters would rout their slaves from their miserable beds and set them to chopping wood and bringing water from the river. The slaves' reward for their labors was ever a kick and a curse.

Yet the Egyptians did not break the spirit of the Hebrews. Our Rabbis say that the Israelites did not give up hope because of four things: they never changed their names; they never changed their language; they did not inform on one another; and they always married their own people.

These strong family ties gave them fortitude to bear hardship with dignity, and to hope that they would be redeemed.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲזֹבוּ אוֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ.

you help the Hebrew women [3] give birth, if it is a boy you shall kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.”

But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the boys live. [4] And the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?”

And the midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous. Before the midwives come to them, they have given birth.”

And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied, and grew very mighty. And Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son that is born you shall cast into the Nile, but every girl you shall let live.”

THE BIRTH OF MOSES

THERE WAS A man from the tribe of Levi who took a wife, a daughter of the tribe of Levi. And the woman bore a son; and when she saw how fair he was, she hid him for three months. And when she

❧ [3] THE HEBREW WOMEN: The Israelites did not break down under slavery, but were equal to freedom. Through the efforts of their loyal wives, they kept their courage, though overworked and mistreated.

The Hebrew women did not desert their husbands. They followed the men and camped near the slave barracks. During the day they netted fish or gathered vegetables; as night fell they prepared a savory dish for their weary husbands. When the men came home, exhausted and spiritless, their wives helped them wash, served their food, and spoke kind and loving words. Their devotion kept up the strength and courage of the Israelites under the rigors of slavery.

❧ [4] THE MIDWIVES: Our Rabbis pointed out that the phrase, “did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them,” implies they “let the boys live.” Why were both phrases used?

This was double praise, our Sages explained. Not only did the midwives refuse to obey the king’s command to kill the male infants, they also cared for the mothers, and washed and fed the infants. Moreover, they went among the other Hebrew women and asked for food and drink for the poor mothers, and for clothes for their babies.

וַתִּירָאן הַמִּיֻּלְדוֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם,  
וַתַּחֲיֶין אֶת הַיִּלָּדִים.

could no longer hide him, she took a basket of papyrus reeds and daubed it with bitumen and with pitch; and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river's edge. And his sister stood at a distance to learn what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river; and her maids walked along the river-side. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw a child, a boy crying. And she had pity on him.

And she said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"

And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go!"

So the maiden went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter

said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages."

So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew she brought it to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, for she said, "I drew him out of the water." [5]

#### MOSES SEES THE SUFFERING OF HIS BRETHREN

AND IT CAME to pass, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his kinsmen and saw their labor. [6] And he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no one around, he smote the Egyptian and he hid him in the sand.

He went out the next day and saw that two Hebrews were fighting. He said to the wrongdoer, "Why do you strike your fellow?"

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🔗 [5] WHY WAS HE NAMED MOSES? Bithiah, Pharaoh's daughter, was taken by the infant's beauty. Her maidservants urged her to throw the baby back into the river. "It is the law that the Hebrew boys be drowned," they reminded her.

Bithiah did not heed them. "I shall raise him as my own," she said. "He shall be called Moshe, for I drew him from the water."

Though Moses had been given seven names by his family, to this day we know him only by the name of Moses.

וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר: כִּי מִן הַמַּיִם מָשִׁיתִיהוּ.

And he said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?"

Then Moses was afraid and said, "Surely, the thing is known."

When Pharaoh heard of the matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh.

#### MOSES SETTLES IN MIDIAN

MOSES CAME TO the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses arose and helped them, and watered their flock.

When they came to their father, he

said, "How is it that you have come so soon today?"

And they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

And he said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Call him, that he may eat bread!"

And Moses was content to dwell with the man; and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as wife. And she bore a son, whom he called Gershom; because, he said, "I have been a stranger in a strange land."

#### THE BURNING BUSH

A LONG TIME later the king of Egypt died. The Children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and their cry came

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וַיֵּצֵא [6] HE WENT OUT TO HIS KINSMEN: Moses was reared in the palace as foster son of Pharaoh's favorite daughter. He grew handsome and tall, and was dressed in the finest of robes. Pharaoh himself gave him a proud horse to ride.

One day, when he was twenty, he rode out to Pithom and Raamses, where the Hebrews were building store-cities for Pharaoh. There he saw their enslavement, the harsh treatment they received, the ready whips that drove them to their labors. Dismounting, Moses went to their aid, bending his back beneath the huge stones they were struggling to put into place. When he walked among them, helping and encouraging them, his eyes were filled with tears. Then it was that he recognized these were his brethren, and that he must lead them.

וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ גֶּרְשֹׁם, כִּי אָמַר: גֵּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God took notice of their plight.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, [7] the priest of Midian; and he led the flock into the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb. And he looked and he saw a thorn bush, and behold the bush was burning with fire, and the bush was not consumed. [8]

Then Moses said, "Let me turn and

see this great sight; why is the bush not consumed?"

And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he answered, "Here I am."

And He said, "Do not come nearer; take your shoes off your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground." Moreover, He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

🔥 [7] WHY WAS MOSES CHOSEN? God does not raise a man to greatness until He has tested him in small things. The Almighty observed the way Moses tended Jethro's flocks, leading them into the wilderness to keep them from grazing, even by accident, on other men's fields.

Once a young kid ran away. Moses pursued it until it stopped at a water hole to drink. "I did not know that you ran away because of thirst," Moses said. "You must be weary from running so far!" He put the kid on his shoulders and carried it back to the flock.

"You have shown kindness and compassion to the sheep," God said. "You shall therefore shepherd My flock, My beloved Children of Israel."

🔥 [8] WHY FROM THE THORN BUSH? Gazing at the thorn bush, Moses thought, "My people are like this lowly bush: small and unimportant. Will they ever be freed from slavery?"

As he spoke, flames began to envelop the bush, and Moses exclaimed with a trembling heart, "O God, now the bush is in flames! Does this mean that my people will be destroyed by the Egyptians?"

The bush burned, but was not consumed; and a voice within him said, "Your people are like this burning bush. It burns and it is not

וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֹּאמֶר: מֹשֶׁה, מֹשֶׁה! וַיֹּאמֶר: הִנְנִי.

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

And the Lord said, "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry under the oppressors; and I know their suffering. And I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a spacious and a good land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring forth My people, the Children of Israel, out of Egypt."

And Moses said, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt?"

And He said, "I will be with you."

And Moses said to God, "Behold, when I come to the Children of Israel and shall say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me: What is His name? what shall I say to them?"

And God said to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the Children of Israel: *Eh'yeh Asher Eh'yeh*, I Am Who I Am—*Eh'yeh* has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.

"Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them: The Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, has appeared to me, and said: I have indeed remembered you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt. And I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite, to a land flowing with milk and honey."

And Moses said, "But perhaps they will not believe me nor listen to me, for they will say: The Lord has not appeared to you."

And the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

And he replied, "A rod."

The Lord said, "Cast it on the ground." And Moses cast it on the ground and it became a serpent; and Moses recoiled from it. [9]

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consumed. The Israelites suffer, but they will never be destroyed."

Our Rabbis also explain: God spoke from the lowly thorn bush to teach that no place, no matter how small and humble, is without God's presence and care.

🕊 [9] MOSES RECOILED FROM IT: A Roman matron boasted to Rabbi Yosé ben Halafta, "From your own Bible I can prove that my idols

וְאֵרֶד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרִים וּלְהַעֲלוֹתוֹ מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֶּה אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה,  
אֶל אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ.



And the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and take it by the tail." And he stretched out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand.

But Moses said to the Lord, "O Lord, I am not a man of words; for I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue."

And the Lord said to him, "Who has given man a mouth? Who makes a man dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Therefore, go now, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what to speak."

And Moses said, "O Lord, I pray Thee, send anyone but me."

Then the Lord became angry at Moses, and He said, "There is your

brother Aaron, the Levite. I know that he can speak well. And he is coming to meet you; and when he sees you, he will be overjoyed. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; and he shall be your spokesman to the people. He shall be to you a mouth, and you shall be in God's stead to him. And you shall take in your hand this rod with which to perform the signs."

#### MOSES RETURNS TO EGYPT

THEN MOSES WENT and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, "Let me go, I beg of you, and I will return to my brethren in Egypt and see whether they are still alive." [10]

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are greater than your God. When the God of Israel appeared in a thorn bush, Moses merely covered his face; but when the rod turned into a serpent, he fled. This proves that the serpent, who is my god, is more powerful than your God!"

Rabbi Yosé rejoined, "Can you not see that there was no place Moses could flee from the true God, even should he so wish, for no place on earth is hidden from Him? But he had only to retreat a few paces to be beyond the reach of the fangs of your serpent-god."

❧ [10] KINDNESS SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN: Before Moses accepted the mission of redeeming Israel, he said to God, "First I must return to Midian to ask my father-in-law's permission to leave. I cannot go without his consent, for he befriended me when I was a stranger in Midian; he gave me a roof over my head, and food, and his daughter as a wife."

בִּי אֲדֹנָי, לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אֲנִי ... כִּי כָבֵד פָּה וְכָבֵד לְשׁוֹן אֲנִי.

And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.” So Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

And the Lord said to Aaron, “Go into

the wilderness to meet Moses.” And he went and met him and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which He had sent him, and all the signs with which He had instructed him.

And God said, “Yes, even before you fulfill My command, ask Jethro’s leave. No man should be ungrateful.”

Jethro consented for Moses to leave Midian, but not that he take his wife and children with him. “Why take your family into trouble?” he asked.

Moses replied, “When people see that I have brought my wife and sons with me, they will believe that deliverance is near, for I would not bring my family into slavery.”

At the border of Egypt, however, Moses met Aaron, who asked, “Who are they that travel with you?”

Moses answered, “My wife and children.” Aaron said quickly, “The Egyptians will seize them and enslave them, for they are the family of a Hebrew. They are not used to slavery as our people have become, and will perish before the day of deliverance. Send them back!”

Moses did as his brother counseled.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה: לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם.



## 13. EXODUS [4-12]

### MOSES AND AARON BEFORE PHARAOH

MOSES AND AARON went and gathered together all the elders of the Children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses,

and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had remembered them, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Then Moses and Aaron [1] came to

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[1] ONLY MOSES AND AARON: The Israelite elders did not have courage enough to go with Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh. Even though Moses said he would speak in the name of the Lord, the elders furtively slipped away, one by one, as they approached the royal palace. Moses and Aaron appeared alone before the king.

The elders failed in their responsibility as leaders. Therefore when God gave the Ten Commandments to the Children of Israel, only Moses was allowed to ascend Mount Sinai; the timorous elders were not worthy of this privilege.

וַיֵּאֱמַן הָעָם, וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי פָקַד יְיָ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה אֶת עֲנִיָּם, וַיִּקְדּוּ  
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ.

Pharaoh, and said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness."

And Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord [2] that I should listen to His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go."

And they said, "The God of the He-

brews revealed Himself to us. Pray, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God."

And the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you interrupt the people at their tasks? Go back to your burdens!" And the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their overseers, saying, "You shall no

❧ [2] WHO IS THE LORD? Thousands of soldiers guarded Pharaoh's magnificent palace, and fierce lions and leopards were chained at its doors. Only those who had been summoned by Pharaoh were permitted to enter the court.

However, Moses and Aaron strode in as though they owned the palace, and the brightness of their faces was such that the soldiers did not dare come near them. When the beasts reared up to strike, Moses lifted his rod and they fell back.

Pharaoh was amazed to see the brothers standing before him. Aaron delivered the message that God wished them to go into the wilderness to worship.

"What is your God's name?" the king answered calmly. "Where does He live? How great is His strength? How many countries bow to Him? How many wars has He won?"

Moses and Aaron declared that God rules over the entire earth, that the stars and planets are His creation, as well as all the creatures of the world.

Pharaoh replied angrily, "I am a god, and I created myself. I cause the Nile to irrigate my land."

He sent for the chronicles of Egypt, wherein were listed the gods of all the nations: Amon, Ra, Isis, Osiris, and the gods of Moab, Zidon, and many more. The name of the Lord, God of Israel, did not appear.

"You are seeking the living God in the graves of the dead," Aaron replied.

אָמְרוּ לוֹ: אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָחוּ וְגִבּוֹרָתוֹ מְלֵא עוֹלָם.

longer give the people straw to make bricks as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the amount of bricks which they have made until now, you shall not diminish at all. For they are lazy; that is why they are crying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Let heavier work be laid upon the men, that they may labor and not pay attention to lying words."

Then the taskmasters of the people and the overseers went out, and they spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh: I will not give you straw. Go yourselves, get straw wherever you can find it, but none of the work shall be diminished."

So the people scattered throughout all

the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. And the taskmasters urged them, saying, "Fulfill your daily task as when there was straw!" And the overseers of the Children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, for the taskmasters said, "Why have you not fulfilled your assignment of making bricks as before?" [3]

Then the overseers of the Children of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal thus with your servants? There is no straw given to your servants, and yet we are told: 'Make bricks!' And your servants are beaten, though the fault is with your own people."

But Pharaoh said, "You are lazy, you

❧ [3] THE OVERSEERS WERE PUNISHED: "Why were the overseers beaten, rather than the Israelites who did not make their quota of bricks?" our Rabbis asked.

When Pharaoh commanded that the Hebrews were not to receive straw for bricks, they wandered over the land, gathering the straw they needed. The Egyptian farmers saw them in the fields and attacked them with whips and sticks, so that it was impossible to meet the daily quotas.

The Egyptian taskmasters asked the Israelite overseers to point out the slaves who had not fulfilled their tasks. The Israelite overseers refused to inform on them, and were flogged.

Then God said, "Because you refused to inform on your brethren, you are worthy to be elders of Israel." When Moses chose elders of Israel after they had gone out of Egypt, he picked from among the former overseers.

תָּבֵן אֵין נָתַן לַעֲבָדֶיךָ, וְלִבְנִים אֹמְרִים לָנוּ עָשׂוּ.

are lazy; that is why you say: 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Get to work now, for no straw will be given to you, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks!"

When they left Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron, who were standing outside. And the overseers said to them, "Let the Lord look upon you and judge you; because you have made us hateful in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants. You have put a sword in their hands to slay us."

Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, "Lord, why hast Thou dealt badly with these people? Why didst Thou send me? [4] Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he has dealt ill with this people; Thou hast not delivered Thy people at all."

And the Lord said to Moses, "You shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For

by a strong hand he shall let them go, and by a strong hand he shall drive them out of his land."

And God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord; and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And I have established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the Children of Israel: I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the burdens

❧ [4] WHY DIDST THOU SEND ME? Moses was saddened, for he had not helped his people. Instead, Pharaoh had increased their burdens. "O Lord," Moses cried, "You sent me to rescue these people, but they suffer more than before! You sent me to save, and yet there is no redemption."

One of the angels heard Moses' plaint, and called, "Lord, punish him! He questions Your decrees!"

"He does not ask for himself, but for his people," God said. Then He turned. "Moses, you must learn to be patient, and to understand that nothing of worth comes quickly. The Hebrews will see My signs and learn My ways. Then will My purpose be revealed and will they become worthy of being redeemed."

וְגֹאֲלִתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזֶרְעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדוֹלִים, וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי  
לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים.

of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I lifted My hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage; I am the Lord."

And Moses spoke so to the Children of Israel, but they would not listen to Moses because of their impatience, and because of cruel bondage.

#### THE SIGNS

THEN THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Go in, speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, that he may let the Children of Israel go out of his land." And Moses spoke before the Lord, saying, "Behold, the Children of Israel have not heeded me; how then shall Pharaoh heed me, since I am slow of speech?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "I have put you in God's stead to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your spokesman. You shall speak all that I command you, and Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh, that he let the Children of Israel go out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will lay My hand upon Egypt and bring forth My people, the Children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by mighty acts of judgment. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch

forth My hand against Egypt, and bring out the Children of Israel from among them."

And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

And then the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron, "When Pharaoh shall speak to you, saying: 'Show us a wonder,' you shall say to Aaron: 'Take your rod, and cast it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a serpent."

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and they did as the Lord had commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

Then Pharaoh called the wise men and the magicians of Egypt; and they did the same thing with their secret arts. Each one cast down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

However, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he did not heed them, just as God had said.

#### THE TEN PLAGUES—[5]

##### THE FIRST PLAGUE

AND THE LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he goes out to the water, and take your stand on the banks of the river to meet

וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם, כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְיָ.

him; and take in your hand the rod that was turned into a serpent.

“And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to you saying: Let My people go that they may serve Me in the wilderness; but till now you have not listened. Therefore, thus says the Lord: By this you shall know that I am the Lord—behold, I will strike with my rod that is in my hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall turn to blood.’”

And Moses and Aaron did so.

#### THE SECOND PLAGUE

WHEN SEVEN DAYS passed after the Lord had struck the river, He spoke to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him: ‘If you refuse to let my people go, I will plague all your borders with frogs.’”

And Aaron stretched out his hand, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, “Plead with the Lord to take away the frogs from me, and I will let the people go.”

And Moses said, “Tomorrow the Lord

will destroy the frogs.” And the Lord did according to the word of Moses.

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

#### THE THIRD PLAGUE

AND THE LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron to strike the dust of the earth, that it may become vermin throughout all the land of Egypt.”

Aaron did so, and all the dust of the earth became vermin, over all the land of Egypt, upon man and upon beast.

But Pharaoh hardened his heart, and did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken.

#### THE FOURTH PLAGUE

AND THE LORD said to Moses, “Stand before Pharaoh and say to him: ‘Let my people go; else if you will not let my people go, I will send swarms of gnats upon you. By tomorrow shall this sign be.’” And the Lord did so.

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and

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🔗 [5] THE TEN PLAGUES: The plagues were not brought upon Pharaoh and his people without warning. For fully twenty days before each plague, Moses warned the Egyptians of the affliction to come, in the hope that they would change their ways; but Pharaoh and his servants scoffed at the warnings.

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר: שְׁלַח אֶת עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדוּנִי בְּמִדְבָּר.



for Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God in this land."

And Moses said, "This would not be right. We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and there we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God."

And Pharaoh said, "I will let you go that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away."

And the Lord removed the swarms of gnats from Pharaoh, from his courtiers, and from his people. But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.

#### THE FIFTH PLAGUE

THEN THE LORD said to Moses, "Now My hand will fall upon Pharaoh's cattle which are in the fields." And all the cattle of Egypt died.

But the heart of Pharaoh was stubborn, and he did not let the people go.

#### THE SIXTH PLAGUE

THEN THE LORD said to Moses and to Aaron, "Take handfuls of soot of the furnace, and let Moses throw it heavenward. This will bring boils upon man and upon beast throughout all the land of Egypt."

And Moses did so. But the Lord hard-

ened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not listen to them.

#### THE SEVENTH PLAGUE

AND THE LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh still oppresses My people. Tomorrow I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been seen, in all the land of Egypt."

And the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire flashing upon the earth.

And Pharaoh said to Moses and Aaron, "I have sinned; the Lord is righteous. Entreat the Lord, and let there be enough to these mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."

And Moses prayed; and the thunder and hail ceased. But Pharaoh sinned again, and hardened his heart.

#### THE EIGHTH PLAGUE

THEN MOSES AND AARON went to Pharaoh, and said to him, "If you refuse again to let the people go, tomorrow the Lord will bring locusts into your land."

Then Pharaoh said to Moses, "Go, serve the Lord your God. But who are they that shall go?"

And Moses replied, "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds."

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה: בְּנוֹעָרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְנֵינוּ נֵלֵךְ, בְּבָנֵינוּ וּבְנֹתֵינוּ, בְּצֹאנֵנוּ וּבַבְּקָרֵנוּ נֵלֵךְ.

And Pharaoh said, "Not so! Only the men may go!" And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

And when it was morning, God brought forth the locusts.

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and he said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God. Forgive this once, and entreat your God that He may take away this death from me."

And the Lord caused a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the sea. But when the locusts were gone, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he did not let the Children of Israel go.

#### THE NINTH PLAGUE

AND THE LORD said to Moses, "Lift your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that may be felt." And there was a thick darkness in all the land.

And Pharaoh called Moses, and said, "Go, serve the Lord. Only let your flocks and herds remain behind. Your little ones may go with you too."

But Moses said, "Our cattle also shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind."

The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not let them go.

Then Pharaoh said to him, "Begone

from me! Beware never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die!"

And Moses said, "You have spoken well; I shall never see your face again."

#### THE PASSOVER LAMB

AND MOSES CALLED all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Let each family draw a lamb out of the flock, and kill it as a Passover sacrifice. And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and smear it on the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.

"And when the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians, and when He sees the blood upon the lintel and on the two side-posts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not let the destroyer come into your houses to smite you. And this day shall be a memorial for you, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord.

"And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance to you and to your sons forever. And it shall come to pass, when you have come to the land which the Lord will give you, as He has promised, that you shall observe this service. And it shall come to pass, when your

וּפָסַח יְיָ עַל הַפֶּתַח וְלֹא יָתֵן הַמַּשְׁחִית לָבוֹא אֶל בְּתִיכֶם לְנֹגֵף.

children shall say to you, 'What is the meaning of this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for He passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads in reverence and worshiped.

And they went and did thus; they did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron.

#### THE TENTH PLAGUE

AND IT CAME to pass at midnight that the Lord struck down all the first-born

in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the first-born of the cattle.

And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Then Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants; and he called Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Arise, go out from among my people, you and the Children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone! And bless me also."

זָבַח פֶּסַח הוּא לִי, אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל בְּתִי בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֹגְפוֹ אֶת מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת  
בְּתִינוּ הִצִּיל.



## 14. EXODUS [12-15]

### THE COMMANDMENT OF MATZOT

THE EGYPTIANS URGED the people of Israel to go out of the land in haste, for they said, "We shall all be dead."

So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs wrapped up in their clothes on

their shoulders. And the Children of Israel did as Moses told them; and they asked of the Egyptians [1] jewels of silver and jewels of gold and garments. And the Lord made the people find favor with the Egyptians, so that they gave them what they asked.

And the Children of Israel journeyed

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[1] THEY ASKED OF THE EGYPTIANS: Years later, when Alexander the Great conquered the world, he let it be known that justice would prevail in his empire. And so the Egyptians came before him to demand justice. "The Hebrews stole from us!" they cried. "When they left our land, they borrowed much gold and silver which they have not returned. Justice, O king!"

The Hebrew elders replied, "O king, let them pay us the wages

וַיִּנָּתֶן אֶת חֵן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁאִילוּם וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת מִצְרַיִם.

from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. And a mixed multitude [2] went up also with them; and much livestock, both flocks and herds.

And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry, nor prepare for themselves any provisions.

And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. And it shall be when the Lord shall bring you into the land of the Canaanite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service. Matzot shall be eaten seven days, and no leavened bread shall be seen among you in all your borders. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying: It is because of

that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt. You shall observe this ordinance in its season from year to year."

Now the time that the Children of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. At the end of four hundred and thirty years, on the very day, all the host of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for he had made the Children of Israel take an oath, saying, "God will surely remember you; then you shall carry up my bones away from here with you."

And the Children of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt.

#### PHARAOH PURSUES

WHEN PHARAOH HAD let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was the shortest way; for God said, "Lest

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due for four hundred years of slavery, for the beatings, and for the drowned children, and we shall gladly return the silver and the gold."

The Egyptians silently left the court.

☞ [2] A MIXED MULTITUDE: Who were the mixed multitude? They were Egyptians who had sympathized with Hebrew slaves, but had been unable to help them. When the Lord redeemed Israel, these Egyptians joined their band and went forth with them to serve the Lord.

מִצּוֹת יֹאכֵל אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים. וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חֲמֵץ, וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שְׂאֹר בְּכָל גְּבוּלְךָ.

it happen that the people regret when they see war, and return to Egypt.” [3] But God led the people around, by way of the wilderness by the Sea of Reeds. And they camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. [4]

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.

When the king of Egypt was told that

the people had fled, the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What have we done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”

And Pharaoh readied his chariots, and took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over all of them. For the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued the Children of Israel. [5]

And the Egyptians pursued them, all

🔗 [3] REGRET WHEN THEY SEE WAR: Why would the Hebrews be afraid of war? An ancient legend has it that the tribe of Manasseh had rebelled against their slavery long before Moses came to redeem his people. “The Lord promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants,” they said. “Let us go up and claim our land.”

They marched out of Egypt, driving Pharaoh’s troops before them. When they reached the Promised Land, the Canaanites joined together and defeated them in battle. Only a few survivors managed to flee back to Egypt and slavery.

Because Moses did not want the newly-freed slaves to become fearful when they saw the relics of war, he took them the longer way.

🔗 [4] ON THE EDGE OF THE WILDERNESS: The Hebrews’ trust in God was so complete that they marched into the wilderness without provisions. All they carried with them was the remainder of the *matzah* and the bitter herbs left from the night of Passover.

🔗 [5] HE PURSUED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: Why did Pharaoh pursue the Hebrews despite his terrible experiences with them? Had he not had punishment enough?

Rabbi Levi compared him to a man who owned a piece of land

וַיֵּי הוֹלֵךְ לְפָנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲוֹתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ, וּלְיָלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם, לְלָכֶת יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה.

the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea. And when Pharaoh drew near, the Children of Israel lifted up their eyes and saw the Egyptians, and they were dreadfully afraid.

And they said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you brought us out of Egypt? Is it not this that we told you in Egypt, when we said: Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would be better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not! Stand firm, and see how the Lord will save you today. For as surely as you now see the Egyptians, you shall never see them again. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

#### MOSES DIVIDES THE SEA

THEN THE LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel, that they go forward. And lift up your rod, [6] and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it; and the Children of Israel shall walk on dry ground into the midst of the sea. And I

covered with thorn bushes and stones. When he walked there, he barked his shins on the stones, and his skin was torn by the thorns. Annoyed, he sold the land cheaply.

The purchaser cleared the thorns, used the stones to erect a wall, and planted flowers and fruit. In a short while the plot was covered with greenery. The former owner passed and was startled to see vines, blossoms, and young fruit trees. He hastened to a court of law to reclaim the plot.

So it was with Pharaoh. As soon as the Israelites left Egypt, they began to act like free men. They stood straight, and sang as they strode along. When Pharaoh heard this, he took off in pursuit.

🌀 [6] LIFT UP YOUR ROD: When the army of Pharaoh overtook them at the sea, the Israelites were frantic. There were two opposing opinions among them as to what to do. One group, terrified, said, "Let us return to Egypt. Better slavery than death!" The other cried, "Let us try

וַאֲתָהּ הָרַם אֶת מִטָּה וְנָטָה אֶת יָדְךָ עַל הַיָּם וּבִקַּעְהוּ, וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ  
הַיָּם בַּיַּבָּשָׁה.

will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall go in after them. And thus I will gain honor through Pharaoh, and all his army and his chariots and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.

The pillar of cloud which had gone before them now went behind them, and it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness, so that the one did not come near the other all the night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand

over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to move back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

Thus the Children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground; [7] and the waters were a wall on their right and on their left. [8]

And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch, the Lord looked forth upon the

to cross! Many will die, but some will reach the other shore." Nahshon, son of Amminadab, was the first to jump into the sea, and others of the tribe of Benjamin waded in after him. Soon the water reached their nostrils.

Moses stood before God and prayed, but God cut short his words, saying, "My children are in distress. The sea is before them, the enemy at their back. Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand to divide the sea, that the Children of Israel may go on dry land."

☞ [7] INTO THE SEA ON DRY GROUND: If the Hebrews entered into the water, why is it written that they entered on dry ground? And conversely, if they entered on dry ground, why is it said that they entered the sea? The Rabbis explained that the sea did not divide until after they had demonstrated their faith by wading into it.

☞ [8] THE WALL IN THE SEA: To express their excitement and wonder at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the Rabbis of the Midrash wove many fanciful legends about it.

The walls of the sea, they said, were covered with fruit trees whose

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבָּשָׁה, וְהַיָּם לָהֶם חֹמָה מִיְּמִינָם וּמִשְׁמָאלָם.



host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and confused the army of the Egyptians. He locked their chariot wheels and made them drag heavily, so that the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against the Egyptians."

And the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may return upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen."

And Moses stretched forth his hand

over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength as morning broke; and the Egyptians fled against it. And the Lord overturned the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; and of all the host of Pharaoh that went into the sea after the Israelites, not one remained. [9] But the Children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians: and

branches protected the Hebrews from the sun. The Israelite mothers could reach up and pluck an orange or pomegranate for their children.

Twelve paths were opened, they declared, one for each tribe. The walls of water were transparent as glass so that the tribes could see each other. Through the brackish water flowed a stream of clean, fresh water at which the Hebrews could quench their thirst.

🔥 [9] NOT ONE REMAINED: Lessons come hard to some. Because Pharaoh had not let Israel go at once, his people had suffered plagues and lost their gold and silver. Nonetheless, he changed his mind again, and brought more trouble upon himself.

The Egyptians were like the servant who had served his master a spoiled fish. In anger, the man said, "Either you will eat the fish, or receive forty lashes, or pay forty silver pieces." The servant chose to eat the spoiled fish, but after eating half of it, cried out that he preferred the lash. After twenty strokes, however, he screamed that he would pay the fine. So he ate spoiled fish, and received twenty lashes, and paid the full fine besides.

וַיֹּשַׁע יְיָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם.

Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses.

#### THE SONG OF MOSES

THEN SANG MOSES and the Children of Israel this song unto the Lord:

"I will sing unto the Lord,  
For He has triumphed gloriously;  
The horse and his rider  
He has hurled into the sea.  
 The Lord is my strength and song,  
 For He has brought me salvation.  
 This is my God, and I will glorify  
 Him,  
 My father's God, whom I shall  
 extol.  
 The Lord is a man of war,  
 The Lord is His name.  
 Pharaoh's chariots and his host  
 He has cast into the sea;  
 And his chosen captains  
 Are sunk in the Sea of Reeds.  
 The deeps cover them;  
 They went down into the depths  
 like a stone.

Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious  
 in power,  
 Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters  
 the enemy!  
 And in the greatness of Thy  
 triumph  
 Thou overthrowest Thine  
 adversaries.  
 Thou sendest forth Thy wrath,  
 And it consumes them like straw.  
 At the blast of Thy nostrils the  
 waters were piled up,  
 The floods stood upright as a wall;  
 The deeps were congealed in the  
 heart of the sea.  
 The enemy said:  
 'I will pursue, I will overtake,  
 I will divide the spoil;  
 My desire shall be satisfied upon  
 them;  
 I will draw my sword,  
 And my hand shall destroy them.'  
 Thou didst blow with Thy wind,  
 and the sea covered them;  
 They sank like lead in the mighty  
 waters.  
 Who is like Thee, O Lord, among  
 the mighty? [10]

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🕎 [10] WHO IS LIKE THEE, O LORD? "Beware," cautioned the Rabbis, "of comparing God with mortal kings. A king's subjects run before him to clear the way, and spread carpets so that his feet do not touch the ground. They place pillows for him to lean on, and serve him sumptu-

אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי גָאֵה גָאֵה, סוֹס וְרוֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַּיָּם.

Who is like Thee, glorious in  
holiness,  
Awe-inspiring, doing wonders?  
 The Lord shall reign for ever and  
 ever."

THE SONG OF MIRIAM

AND MIRIAM THE prophetess, the sister

of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand;  
 and all the women followed her with  
 tambourines and with dances. And Mir-  
 iam sang with them:

"Sing to the Lord,  
 For He has triumphed gloriously;  
 The horse and its rider  
 He has hurled into the sea."

ous meals. They light bright torches and adorn his palaces with tap-  
 estries and carpets.

"The King of Kings does the very opposite. He clothes the fields  
 with grass, so that man does not walk on the bare earth. He lights  
 the world with the sun and the moon, and prepares the widest variety  
 of foods. He adorns His palace, the world, with mountains and lakes.  
 The flowers bud for His subjects, and the birds sing for them. His  
 dominion is without end, and His reign is eternal."

מִי כַמּוֹכָה נֶאֱדָר בְּקִדְשׁ, נוֹרָא תְהִלּוֹת, עוֹשֶׂה פֶלֶא.



## 15. EXODUS [15-18]

JOURNEY TO SINAI—

THE PEOPLE HAVE NO WATER

AND MOSES LED Israel onward from the Sea of Reeds, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; [1] and they journeyed for three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they reached Marah, they could not drink the water for it was bitter. And the people

murmured against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. And he cast it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There God gave them laws, and He said, "If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and will do that which is right in His eyes, and

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[1] THE WILDERNESS OF SHUR: The Children of Israel obeyed Moses and followed him without hesitation into the wilderness. This was proof of their faith in God, for the wilderness was a barren waste, crawling with snakes, lizards and scorpions.

וַיֹּאמֶר: אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמָע לְקוֹל יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִיָּשֵׁר בְּעֵינֶיךָ תַעֲשֶׂה...

will obey His commandments and observe all His laws, I will not put any of the diseases upon you which I have put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that heals you."

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. And they camped there by the water.

#### THE PEOPLE HAVE NO FOOD

THEN THEY JOURNEYED from Elim, and the Children of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from Egypt.

And the whole congregation of the Children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, where we sat by the fleshpots, where we ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us into this wilderness to kill all of us with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will send bread down to you from heaven like rain; and the people shall go out and gather all they need each day."

So Moses and Aaron said to the Children of Israel, "In the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, for He has

heard your murmuring; and what are we that you grumble against us? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord."

In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew evaporated, there were upon the surface of the wilderness fine flakes, thin as frost on the ground. And when the Children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "*Man hu?* What is this?"—for they did not know what it was.

And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the Lord has given. Every man of you gather as much as he needs; an *omer* for each person, according to the number of souls in his tent."

#### THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL EAT MANNA FROM HEAVEN

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL did so, and some gathered much and some gathered little. But when they measured it with an *omer*, he who had gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little did not lack. Each gathered as much as he could use.

Then Moses said to them, "No one is to leave any of it till the morning." Nevertheless they did not listen to Moses, but some of them kept it until the morning, and it bred worms and rotted; and Moses was angry with them.

... וְהָאֲנָשִׁים לְמִצּוֹתָיו וְשִׁמְרָתָּ כָּל חֻקָּיו – כָּל הַמַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר שִׁמַּתִּי בַּמִּצְרִים לֹא  
אֲשִׁים עָלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי יְיָ רוֹפֵאֲךָ.

So they gathered it every morning, [2] every man according to his needs; and as the sun grew hot, it melted.

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two *omers* for each; and all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said to them, "That is what the Lord has spoken: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you need to bake, and cook what you need to cook; and whatever remains put aside to be kept until the morning."

And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not spoil, nor were there worms in it.

Then Moses said, "Eat this today, for

today is a Sabbath to the Lord. Today you shall not find any in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there shall be none."

However, some of the people went out to gather it on the seventh day, but they found none.

And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep My commandments and My teachings? See, the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."

The House of Israel called it manna. [3] It was white, like coriander seeds;

❧ [2] EVERY MORNING: Why did the bread from heaven (manna) fall every day?

In answer, Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai told of a king whose son was studying at an academy. Once a year the boy returned for money and supplies. The father complained because he saw his son so rarely. So he changed the practice and said, "Come every day for your provisions that I may see your face."

So, too, with Israel. In the daily search for manna, they turned their hearts to the Holy One, Blessed Be He, every morning.

❧ [3] HOW DID THE MANNA TASTE? "My bread which I gave you, fine flour and oil and honey wherewith I fed you," wrote the prophet Ezekiel (16:19). The Rabbis say that this verse refers to the taste of the manna. To the young it tasted like bread; to the old, like honey; and to the infant, it was as milk.

בַּחֹרִים הָיוּ טוֹעָמִים בּוֹ טַעַם לֶחֶם, וְקִנִּים טַעַם דָּבַשׁ, תִּינוּקוֹת טַעַם חֵלֶב.

and its taste was like wafers made with honey.

Then Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: Let an *omer* of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt."

And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an *omer* of manna in it, and store it up before the Lord, to be kept for future generations." And Aaron did as the Lord commanded Moses.

And the Children of Israel ate manna for forty years, until they came to the borders of the land of Canaan.

#### WATER FROM A ROCK

ALL THE CONGREGATION of the Children

of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, and they camped at Rephidim; and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink."

And Moses said to them, "Why do you find fault with me, and why do you put the Lord to test?"

But the people thirsted for water, and they complained to Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?"

And Moses cried to the Lord, "What am I to do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" [4]

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Take in your hand

☞ [4] READY TO STONE ME: Our Rabbis say that God was vexed with Moses for these words, and said, "You slander My people. Go before them, and see if they will stone you."

Moses went before the people of Israel and, behold, every man rose in his honor!

Then God said to Moses, "Be patient with My children, even as a shepherd is patient with his flock."

☞ [5] STRIKE THE ROCK: When God told Moses to strike the rock, Moses pleaded, "But this rod has been used for evil; it became a snake, changed the Nile into blood. Now would you have it deal kindly?"

And God answered, "Let everyone see that a stick is but a stick. It is good or bad only as it is used."

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה: מָה תִּרְיִבֹּן עִמָּדִי, מָה תִּנְסֹן אֶת יְיָ?

the rod with which you struck the river. Go to the rock in Horeb and I will stand there; and you shall strike the rock [5] and water will gush out of it that the people may drink.”

And Moses did so before the eyes of the elders of Israel.

AMALEK MAKES WAR ON  
THE ISRAELITES

THEN CAME AMALEK and attacked Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, “Choose us men, [6] and go out to fight with Amalek. I will take my stand tomorrow on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.”

So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Whenever Moses held up his hand, [7] Israel prevailed; but when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

But Moses’ hands became tired; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur held up his hands. So his hands were steady until sundown.

And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

JETHRO COMES TO MOSES

NOW JETHRO, the priest of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel, His people. And Jethro took Zipporah, Moses’ wife, and her two sons, and came to Moses into the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God.

🔗 [6] CHOOSE US MEN: Why did Moses use the word “us” in this line, rather than “me”? He was suggesting that Joshua choose men satisfactory to them both, for he treated Joshua as an equal. From this we learn, “Let the honor of your disciple be dear to you as your own honor, and the honor of your associate as the awe of your teacher, and the awe of your teacher as the awe for the Almighty” (Pirké Avot 4:15).

🔗 [7] WHEN MOSES HELD UP HIS HAND: Our Rabbis ask: Could Moses’ hands bring victory when they were raised, defeat when lowered?

When the Israelites saw Moses raise his hand in prayer, they were inspired to renewed valor. When he dropped his hand, they lost faith and could not fight.

וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וַגִּבֹּר יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכִאֲשֶׁר יָנִיחַ יָדוֹ וַגִּבֹּר עַמֶּלֶק.



Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and bowed down and kissed him. They asked of each other's welfare; [8] and they entered the tent.

And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and how the Lord delivered them.

And Jethro rejoiced in all the goodness which the Lord had done for Israel. And Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you from the hand of Pharaoh and from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods."

#### JETHRO'S ADVICE TO MOSES

IT HAPPENED on the next day that Moses

sat to judge the people; and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "Why do you judge the people all alone, and the people stand about you from morning until evening?"

And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. And I judge between a man and his neighbor, and I make them know the statutes of God and His teachings."

And Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and the people that are with you; for the task is too heavy for you: [9] you cannot perform it alone. Listen to me, and let me advise you, that God may be with you. Select from the people able men,

✎ [8] THEY ASKED OF THEIR WELFARE: The Hebrew for "their welfare" is *l'shalom*, which means "to their peace." Our Rabbis say that before Moses told Jethro what God had done for Israel, he offered him the greeting of peace. Great is peace, for it precedes even the praise of God!

✎ [9] FOR THE TASK IS TOO HEAVY: Why was the judging too heavy for Moses, the man who had led his people out of slavery, and who had ascended Sinai? Because a judge has a grave responsibility: his decisions change the lives of those who come before him. The Talmud says he must judge as though a sword were suspended above him. If he is unjust, God Himself sits in judgment over him.

וַיַּחַד יִתְּרוֹ עַל כָּל הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְיָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל.

God-fearing men, honest men who hate bribery; and make them chiefs of thousands, chiefs of hundreds, chiefs of fifties, and chiefs of tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they shall judge themselves. So they shall make it easier for you, since they will share the burden with you. If

you will do this, you shall be able to endure, and the people too shall go to their place in peace.”

So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said.

And Moses let his father-in-law depart; and he went his way to his own land. [10]

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❧ [10] JETHRO RETURNS TO HIS OWN LAND: Why did Moses send his father-in-law home just before the revelation on Mount Sinai?

Because when Israel was in Egypt, slaving with clay and brick, Jethro lived in Midian in peace and quiet. He who suffers with the community shall know its joys, but he who does not share its suffering cannot rejoice with it.

וְהָיָה כָּל הַדָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל יָבִיאוּ אֵלָיָהּ, וְכָל הַדָּבָר הַקָּטָן יִשְׁפֹּטוּ הֵם.



## 16. EXODUS [19-31]

### THE COVENANT:

#### REVELATION AT MOUNT SINAI

IN THE THIRD month after the Children of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that same day, they came to the wilderness of Sinai. And Israel camped there before the mountain.

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the House of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel: [1] You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now, therefore, if you will listen to My voice,

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[1] THE HOUSE OF JACOB: Why does the text specify both the House of Jacob and the Children of Israel; are they not one? the Rabbis pondered.

They read "Children of Israel" to mean the whole people, but the "House of Jacob" as the women of Israel. The women are to be taught first because it is they who will first instruct the children in the ways of the Torah.

לָמָּה לְנָשִׁים תַּחֲלָה? כִּדִּי שִׂיָּהִיו מְנַהִיגוֹת אֶת בְּנֵיהֶן לַתּוֹרָה.

and keep My Covenant, you shall be My own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

Moses summoned the elders of the people and set before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." [2] And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

And the Lord said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, that the

people may hear when I speak with you and may always believe you. Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in sight of all the people."

On the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud *Shofar* blast. And all the people in the camp trembled.

And Moses brought the people out of

❧ [2] ALL THAT THE LORD HAS SPOKEN WE WILL DO: Before God gave the Torah to the Children of Israel, He approached the Edomites, the children of Esau, and said to them, "Will you accept My Torah?" "What is written in it?" they asked Him. "You shall not kill," God replied. "Our father Esau was blessed with these words: 'By the sword you shall live,'" replied the Edomites. "We cannot accept Your Torah."

Then God asked the children of Ishmael to accept His Torah. They asked, "What is written in it?" And He answered, "You shall not steal." "It was promised to our father Ishmael, that his hand would be against every man," they made reply. "How can we accept Your Torah?"

God offered the Torah to the Canaanites, who asked, "What is written in Your Torah?" He answered, "A just measure you shall use, a perfect scale . . ." The Canaanites replied, "How can we prosper by Your Torah?"

To each nation in turn He offered His Law, and none accepted.

Finally God turned to Israel: "Will you accept My Torah, wherein is written a guide to a righteous world?" And the Children of Israel answered, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will obey."

וַיֵּעֲנוּ כָּל הָעַם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ: כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְיָ נַעֲשֶׂה.

the camp to meet God; [3] and they stood at the lower part of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke rose like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. And when the voice of the *Shofar* became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him aloud.

#### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

AND GOD SPOKE all these words, [4] saying,

1. "I am the Lord [5] your God, [6] who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

2. "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any manner of likeness

🔔 [3] WHO WILL BE YOUR SURETY? Even when the Children of Israel were gathered before Sinai, God hesitated, lest the Torah be not safe in their hands. Although the Hebrews desired the Torah, He foresaw that they might be unfaithful to its teachings. "O Children of Israel, what will be your surety for this most precious possession?" He asked. The Israelites replied, "All our gold and silver we give as pledge."

"The wealth of all the world does not measure to one line of the Torah," God answered.

Thereupon the Israelites declared, "Our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are our assurance to You."

"Your fathers are My debtors and cannot be your surety," was the answer.

Then the Israelites offered, "We give You our children in pledge."

"These I accept as surety," said the Lord.

And Israel responded, "We shall teach them diligently to our children, and to our children's children after them."

🔔 [4] GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS: In Deuteronomy it is written: "Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out?" (4:33). Concerning this, the Rabbis say that if God had spoken in the full strength of His great voice, none could have withstood its power. God so spoke that each heard according to his ability: the young according to their capacity, the old to their understanding, and the children to theirs.

אָנְכִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים.

of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them nor serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a demanding God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; but showing lovingkindness unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments.

3. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

4. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do

all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any manner of work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is therein, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it.

5. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. [7]

6. "You shall not murder.

7. "You shall not commit adultery.

🕊 [5] I AM THE LORD: When God uttered these words, the whole world stood still: no bird sang, and that which flew in mid-air remained suspended without moving a wing. The waves in the ocean congealed. Not a creature uttered a sound. Never before had there been such silence in the world, and never will there be such a silence again. In this awesome stillness the world listened breathlessly to "I am the Lord your God."

🕊 [6] YOUR GOD: As the host of Israel stood before Sinai, the voice thundered, "I am the Lord your God!" "Your" is used in the singular, said our Sages, so that each man shall understand that though the voice spoke to everybody, yet it spoke to him alone.

🕊 [7] HAVE YOU PARENTS? When Moses ascended Mount Sinai he was taken to heaven, the Midrash tells us. The angels protested, "Is a mortal to receive the holy Torah? Leave the Torah with us, O Lord."

זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ. שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלָאכָתְךָ, וַיּוֹם  
הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה.

8. "You shall not steal.

9. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

10. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

And all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, and the blast of the *Shofar*, and the mountain smoking; [8] and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. And they said to Moses, "You speak with us and we will

hear; but do not let God speak with us, lest we die."

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, for God has come to prove you, and that reverence of Him may be with you, so that you will not sin."

And the people stood afar off; but Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the Children of Israel: You yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth shall you

God said to Moses, "Reply to them."

And Moses answered, "The Torah was meant for man. Were angels enslaved so that God had to redeem them? Do angels work, so that they require rest on the Sabbath? Do angels have parents to honor? Can they murder or steal? No, the Torah is meant for man."



[8] THE KINGS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER: Before the giving of the Ten Commandments, peals of thunder sounded throughout the earth. The heathen nations trembled, and their kings rushed to take counsel with Balaam, the heathen prophet, lest another flood drown the world. God had promised Noah that never again would He send such a flood. Balaam assured them. The thunder had sounded because God was giving the Hebrews His commandments.

The kings were not reassured. Israel had been freed from the yoke of Egypt, had witnessed the destruction of Pharaoh's army, and had smashed the Amalekites. Their new gift would further strengthen the former slaves.

Balaam calmed them with the words of Proverbs (3:17), "The ways of the Torah are pleasant and all her paths are peace."

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה: דַּבֵּר אֵתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה, וְאַל יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים פֶּן נָמוּת.

make unto Me, and shall sacrifice on it your offerings. In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you."

#### THE ORDINANCES OF THE LORD

THESE ARE THE ordinances which you are to set before them:

##### *Slaves*

If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go free with no payment. If he came in alone, he shall go out alone; if he was married, his wife shall go out with him.

But if the slave shall say, "I love my master; I do not wish to be free," then his master shall bring him before God. And he shall bring him to the door or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and then he shall serve him forever.

##### *Justice*

You shall not utter a false report; do not join hands with the wicked to be a false witness.

You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shall you bear witness in a suit to pervert justice by following a multitude. Nor shall you favor a poor man in a lawsuit because he is poor.

You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his case. Keep far from a

false matter; and the innocent and the righteous you shall not slay, for I will not forgive the wicked.

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

If you chance upon your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely take it back to him.

If you see the donkey of your enemy lying under a burden, you shall not ignore him; you shall surely help him to free it.

##### *Damages*

If a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall be responsible; he shall pay money to the owner of the animal, and the dead beast shall be his.

If a man's ox hurts another's so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide its price; and the dead beast also they shall divide. But if it was known that the ox was likely to gore, and its owner has not kept it in, he must pay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his.

If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. If what he stole is found alive in his possession, whether it be ox, or donkey, or sheep, he shall pay double.

If a man lets his beast loose, and it

לֹא תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי רֵבִים לְרָעוֹת, וְלֹא תַעֲנֶה עַל רֵיב, לְנִטּוֹת אַחֲרֵי רֵבִים, לְהָטוֹת.



feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and of his own vineyard.

### *Widow and Orphan*

You must not wrong any widow or fatherless child. If you wrong them in any way, and if they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry.

### *The Poor*

If you lend money to any of My people, to the poor among you, you shall not act as a creditor to him; neither shall you charge him interest.

If you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you shall return it to him by sun-

down, for that is his only covering. It is his garment for his skin; in what shall he sleep? When he will cry to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

### *Bodily Injury*

If men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is laid up in bed, if he gets up again and walks around on his staff, the one who struck him shall be acquitted. However, he must pay him for the loss of his time, and have him fully restored to health.

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. [9]

If a man strikes the eye of his manserv-

🔗 [9] EYE FOR EYE: The Torah does not seek revenge. In ancient times, men took vengeance for injuries. Unless the hurt was done by one of his own clan, vengeance was a matter of tribal loyalty.

The avengers sought not "measure for measure" from the culprit, as an eye for an eye, but his death.

In Genesis, Lamech boasts he is a great warrior. He killed a man whose fellow tribesman wounded him. He killed a child of another tribe because a member bruised him with a stone. He further boasts that while other tribes, such as the tribe of Cain, avenge injury sevenfold, he avenges seventy-sevenfold (4:23-24).

The Torah forbade wanton killing in revenge, and limited the punishment to fit the crime.

In the days of the Second Temple, the Rabbis worked out a law that is as modern and just as present damage laws. They read "an eye for an eye" to mean financial compensation. An injured person must receive payment for medical costs, loss of time, and permanent injury (see *Baba Kamma*, 83b).

הִיא שְׂמֶלְתוֹ לְעוֹרוֹ, בְּמָה יִשְׁכָּב? וְהָיָה כִּי יִצְעַק אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּי, כִּי חֲנוּן אֲנִי.

ant, or of his maidservant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for his eye's sake. And if he knocks out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth, he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

And if a man strikes his manservant or his maidservant with a rod, and he dies by his hand, he shall surely be punished.

If a man willfully plans to murder another, even from My altar you shall take him, that he may die.

And if he steals a man and sells him, or if he be found in his possession, he shall surely be put to death.

### *The Sabbath*

Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the stranger may be refreshed.

Faithfully you shall keep My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.

The Children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual Covenant. It is a sign between Me and the Children of Israel forever, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested.

### THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL ARE GIVEN LAWS

AND MOSES CAME and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances. And all the people answered with one voice, and said: "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do."

And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and put up twelve pillars, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

And he took the book of the Covenant, [10] read it to the people, and they said: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will obey."

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☞ [10] THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT: The Torah was given in the wilderness because it is the property of no nation or land. Whoever wishes may accept it or study it. The Torah belongs to everyone.

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִשְׁבֹּת, לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ שׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמוֹרְךָ,  
וַיָּנַפֶּשׁ בֶּן אֲמָתְךָ וְהַגֵּר.



## 17. EXODUS [24-32]

### MOSES ON MOUNT SINAI

AND THE LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain, and be there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, and the Torah and the commandment which I have written, that you may teach them."

And Moses and Joshua his attendant rose up. And Moses said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we return to you. Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute, let him bring it to them."

And Moses ascended the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.

And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

### THE GOLDEN CALF

WHEN THE PEOPLE saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god [1] who shall go before us; for we do not know what has become of the man Moses, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt."

And Aaron said to them, "Take off the golden rings from the ears of your wives,

קוֹם עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ. כִּי זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם, לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה הָיָה לוֹ.

of your sons and your daughters, and bring them to me.”

Then all the people took off the golden rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he took them from their hands, and made a molten calf. And they said, “This is your

god, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” [2]

And when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron proclaimed, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.” So they rose up early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings, after which the

🔔 [1] MAKE US A GOD: Shocked at the people’s request, Hur, Miriam’s husband, cried, “You are a stubborn and thankless people! You have seen the glory of God, which He Himself revealed before you, yet you would worship an idol!”

The wrathful people stoned him to death, and then threatened Aaron, “Unless you make us a god, a visible god who shall go before us, we will kill you too.” Aaron did not wish the Israelites to kill any more. He took it upon himself to make the idol, but he delayed, hoping that Moses would return before it was built. First he requested their wives’ earrings, in the hope that the women would refuse to give up their adornments, but the men even brought the rings from their own ears. Finally Aaron began to fashion an idol.

When Moses still did not come, Aaron raised his eyes to heaven, and said, “Almighty God, I do this against my will, that You may not count the sin against the Children of Israel after they repent.”

🔔 [2] THE GOLDEN CALF: Our Rabbis sought to explain how it was that only forty days after God revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, while Moses was preparing the tablets, the Israelites worshiped an idol.

Moses had promised he would return on the fortieth day, the Rabbis explained. The people counted from the day of his departure, whereas he did not include the days spent on the long, slow ascent. As Moses did not return when expected, they assumed he was dead. Like children, unable to comprehend an invisible God, they became frightened and called on a visible god for help.

תָּלָה אֶהֱרֵן עֵינָיו לַשָּׁמַיִם וְאָמַר: אֶתָּה יוֹדֵעַ שְׁבַעֲל־כָּרְחִי אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה.

people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to make merry.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down at once; [3] for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have turned

aside quickly from the way which I commanded them." [4]

And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand. The tablets were the work of God, and the writing

🔔 [3] GO DOWN AT ONCE: God said to Moses, "Go down at once."

"What is my sin, Almighty?" asked Moses. And God said, "Your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have become corrupt."

"Why are they now my people and not Yours?" queried Moses. "When You sent me to redeem them, You said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people'" (Exodus 3:7).

"I reject them as My people," God replied. "They have forgotten My word. In My place they worship the image of an ox."

And Moses said, trembling, "O Lord, what will You do to them?"

"I will destroy them, but of you I will make a great nation."

"You have made a vow to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to multiply their children as the stars of heaven, and now You wish to destroy Israel and to make me a great nation? If a three-legged stool has no stability, how then shall the one-legged stool stand? If You will not forgive Your people their sin, Almighty, blot me out too, I pray You, from Your book of remembrance."

God answered, "They are not worthy to be My people. Though I gave them My Torah, they bowed to a calf of gold."

"Almighty God, why are You so wrathful? They made only an assistant to You. The calf will help You. You will make the sun and moon to shine, and the calf will light the stars. You will make the rain fall to the earth, and the calf will bring the dew."

God said to Moses, "Are you as misled as they? The calf they made with their hands has no power; it is a work of delusion." Said Moses, "Then why be concerned with it?"

"Is the fault not Yours?" he argued further. "You brought them

לְךָ-רֵד, כִּי שָׁחַת עֲמֶךָ אֲשֶׁר הָעֲלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם. סָרוּ מִהֵרָ מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִים.

was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets.

When Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." And Moses said, "It is not the voice of the victor, neither is it the voice of the defeated. It is a noise of singing that I hear."

As soon as he came near the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger blazed, and he flung the tablets

from his hands, and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. [5] And he took the calf which they had made and burned it, and ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water, and made the Children of Israel drink of it.

And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my lord be so hot; you know that the people are set on evil. So they said to me:

into Egypt where men worship animal gods. In their bondage, the Children of Israel learned from their Egyptian masters. Remember from which land You set them free."

And God listened to the plea of Moses.

☞ [4] **MOSES' FACE DIMS:** Moses' face was radiant with light when God finished teaching him the Torah. But when the Israelites made the golden calf, this light was dimmed. "You achieved your greatness through the people," said God. "When their greatness is dimmed, so is yours."

☞ [5] **WHY DID MOSES CAST DOWN THE TABLETS?** As Moses descended the mountain, he heard jubilant cries from the camp below. At the sight of the calf, he was horrified. "How can I give these Tablets of the Covenant, which forbid idol-worship, to a people in the midst of their revels?"

As he said this to himself, the letters engraved upon the stone tablets vanished, and only the bare rock remained. Until then, the word of God had made the tablets light, and Moses had felt no weight; now he could not hold them; they fell from his hands, and were dashed to pieces on the boulders below.

וַיִּחַר אֶף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת הַלְּוִיָּוֹת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אוֹתָם פַּתַּח הָהָר.

Make us a god which shall go before us, because we do not know what has become of the man Moses, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt. Then I said to them: Whoever has any gold, let him take it off. So they gave it to me and I cast it into the fire, and out came this calf."

Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side, come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered to him.

On the next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up to the Lord, perhaps I shall win forgiveness for your sin."

And Moses returned to the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people; it is a stiff-necked people. Now let My wrath blaze against them, that I

may destroy them; [6] but of you I will make a great nation."

And Moses said, "Oh, this people has sinned a great sin, and have made themselves a god of gold. Yet now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin—and if not, blot me out too, I pray Thee, from Thy book which Thou hast written."

But the Lord said to Moses, "He who has sinned against Me, him only will I blot out of My book."

And Moses beseeched God, "Lord, why dost Thy wrath blaze against Thy people, whom Thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent He brought them forth, to slay them in the mountains, and to wipe them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Thy fierce

🔥 [6] THAT I MAY DESTROY THEM: When God threatened to destroy Israel because of the golden calf, Moses asked, "Is Israel worse than Sodom? When Abraham pleaded, You offered to spare Sodom if there were in it ten righteous men. Yet in Israel there are eighty righteous men."

"Who are the righteous?" asked God.

"The seventy elders of Israel, and Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar, Phinehas and Caleb."

"These are seventy-seven," said God.

"Do you not include Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who join in pleading for their children?"

And God hearkened to Moses.

מִי לִי - אֱלֹהִים!

wrath, and do not do this evil to Thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, Thy servants, to whom Thou didst swear by Thine own self: I will multiply your children as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of I will give to your children, and they shall inherit it forever."

And the Lord set aside the punishment which He said He would do to His people. [7] And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. My angel shall go before you. [8] Nevertheless, on the day I make an accounting, I will repay them for this sin."

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❧ [7] THE LORD FORGAVE HIS PEOPLE: Moses was so angered by the golden calf that he moved his tent outside the camp and dwelt alone. The sorrowing people begged him to return, but he refused.

"Though we have repented our sins," they said, "God has left us. Now you abandon us too. We are as orphans."

Then Moses heard God's voice: "Return unto the camp."

And Moses said, "Return also unto Your people, O Lord, as I do now."

And God listened to Moses.

❧ [8] FORGIVENESS: The day on which God assured Moses that Israel was forgiven for the golden calf was Yom Kippur, the day set by Him for forgiveness.

וַיִּנָּחֵם יְיָ עַל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ.





## 18. EXODUS [33-40]

MOSES ASKS THAT GOD'S GLORY LEAD  
THE HEBREWS

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses, "Go from here, you and the people that you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And I will send an angel before you, to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, for you are a stubborn people."

And when the people heard these dreadful words, they mourned, and no man put on his ornaments.

And Moses said to the Lord, "See, Thou sayest to me: Bring up this people;

but Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in Thy sight, show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee; and consider that this nation is Thy people."

And He said, "My Presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest."

Then Moses said, "If Thy Presence goes not with me, do not take us from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in Thy sight, I and Thy people? How else are we distinguished from all people on the face of the earth?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do this also, for you have found favor in My sight, and I know you by name."

וְנִפְלִינוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי מִכָּל הָעַם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

And Moses said, "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory." [1]

And He replied, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

And He said, "But you cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live."

#### THE SECOND TABLETS

AND THE LORD said to Moses, "Hew two tablets of stone like the first; and I will write upon them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and ascend Mount

Sinai, and present yourself to Me on the top of the mountain. No man shall come up with you, neither let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain."

Moses rose early in the morning, and he hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up to Mount Sinai as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hands the two tablets of stone. And the Lord descended in a cloud and passed by before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious God, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; but He will not clear the guilty."

❧ [1] SHOW ME THY GLORY: When Moses asked to see His glory, God showed him a huge arch, enclosing gates of light. "For whom are these gates?" asked Moses.

"For those who study My Torah," answered God. Another beautiful pair of gates then opened. "Whose are these?" asked Moses.

"These are the gates of comfort and salvation," said God. "They are for all who call upon Me in their need."

A third pair of gates, even more splendid, swung wide, and within them were heaps of crowns. On each crown were carved the words, "A Good Name." "For whom are these crowns?" asked Moses.

"For those who do charity and righteousness; who raise the orphaned; who feed the poor and clothe the tattered," answered God.

Finally, another heavenly set of gates appeared. "These are the gates of My Grace," God told Moses. "Those who strive to serve Me will enter here. Man can give Me nothing, nor can his service enrich Me; but when I see his heart and mind striving to serve Me, I will have compassion on him and he will become Mine."

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֶרְבֵּי אֲפִימִים וְרַב חֶסֶד וְאֶמֶת. נוֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים, נוֹשֵׂא  
עוֹן וְפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה.

And Moses bowed his head to the ground and worshiped.

#### MOSES' FACE BEAMS

MOSES WAS THERE with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote upon the tablets the words of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments.

And it came to pass when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony, he did not know that his face was radiant.

When Aaron and all the Children of Israel saw Moses, and saw that the skin of his face was radiant, they were afraid to come near him. And Moses called to them; then Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. And afterward all the Children of Israel came near, and he told them all that which he was commanded.

#### THE MISHKAN—THE PORTABLE SANCTUARY

AND MOSES SPOKE to all the congregation,

“The Lord has commanded: Take from among you gifts for the Lord. Let everyone whose heart is willing bring the Lord's offering: gold and silver and brass; and blue and purple and scarlet material, fine linen and goats' hair; and rams' skins dyed red and sealskins, and acacia wood; and oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense. And let them make Me a sanctuary [2] that I may dwell among them. [3]

“And let every wise-hearted man among you come, and make all that the Lord has commanded: the Tabernacle, its tent, and its covering, its clasps and its boards, its pillars and its pedestals; the Ark with its poles, the Ark-cover, and the veil of the screen; the table, and its poles and all its vessels; and the showbread; the *menorah* also for the light, and its vessels and its lamps, and the oil for the light; and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offering, and the laver with its base; and the plaited garments for ministering in the holy place.”

And the Children of Israel brought voluntary offerings to God: every man

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🔗 [2] THE TABERNACLE OF TESTIMONY: When God forgave Israel, He said, “I will let My Presence dwell in their midst. They shall rear My Sanctuary as a testimony of My forgiveness.”

The Tabernacle was not intended as a dwelling place for God, for the heavens cannot contain Him, and the earth is but His footstool.

וַיְהִי שֵׁם עַם יִי אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה, לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתָה.

and every woman whose heart prompted him, for all the work which God had commanded to be made.

And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab, and every wise-hearted man in whose heart the Lord had put wisdom in all manner of workmanship. And they took from Moses all the offering which the Children of Israel had brought for the construction of the Sanctuary.

And the people continued to bring freewill-offerings every morning. And all the skilled men that wrought all the

work of the Sanctuary, said to Moses, "The people are bringing much more than is necessary for the work which the Lord commanded."

And Moses proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman bring anything more for the work of the Sanctuary." So the people were stopped from bringing any more.

And the skilled men made the Tabernacle with ten curtains. Bezalel made the Ark of acacia wood, and he overlaid it with pure gold. And he made the

"But," said God, "this Tabernacle shall be a token of My affection. When it is built, I shall dwell in their midst."

The Rabbis comment, "Note that God did not say He would dwell in the Tabernacle, but in their midst. When the people serve with a willing heart and erect in its beauty a Tabernacle to His Name, God is among them."

✎ [3] GOD'S DWELLING PLACE: When God said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary," Moses was startled.

"These requests are beyond my understanding," he said. "You asked that each man give a ransom for his soul—half a shekel. Yet if a man were to give all he possesses for his soul, it would not be enough. Then You commanded the Children of Israel concerning the offerings made by fire! Who can bring sufficient offerings to You? The Lebanon with all its forests is not sufficient for a burnt-offering worthy of You. Now You request a dwelling place, a sanctuary. The heavens, and the heavens of the heavens, cannot contain You, much less a sanctuary we can build for You."

And God answered, "I do not need your offerings, your food, nor your sanctuary. They are for your sake, not for Mine."

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּצַלְאֵל וְאֶל אוֹהֵלִיאָב וְאֶל כָּל אִישׁ חָכֵם לֵב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְיָ חָכְמָה בְּלִבּוֹ.

*menorah* of pure gold. He made of acacia wood the altar of incense, and overlaid it with gold. [4] He made the holy anointing oil, and he made the laver and its base of brass. And he made a court round about the Tabernacle and

the altar, and set up a screen at the gate of the court.

So Moses finished the work. [5] Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.

❧ [4] THE CROWNS OF BEZALEL: When Bezalel made the Tabernacle according to God's plans, he carved crowns on the altar, on the table, and on the Ark. The crown of the altar was for the priesthood; and that on the table for the kings who would rule in Israel. But, asked our Sages, for whom was the crown of the Torah?

And they answered: Anyone who wishes to attain the crown of the Torah, let him come and take it!

❧ [5] MOSES FINISHED THE WORK: A man who handles the community's money should publicly give a full accounting. Our teacher, Moses, set the example.

God said of Moses, "He is trusted in all My house." Yet people would remark, "Is it impossible that he who has charge of the Sanctuary should get rich?" Others winked and nodded their heads.

Therefore, when the work of the Sanctuary was complete, Moses gathered the whole congregation of Israel. "I collected from you many valuable materials," he told them. "Now that the work is done, I shall give you a full accounting."

The people sat with him, and together they began the tally. When they finished, they found the weight of seventeen hundred and seventy-five silver shekels missing.

Moses began to worry. "Woe is me! They will accuse me of stealing. Where is the weight of the missing shekels?"

He checked his figures and discovered that he had not counted the hooks on the pillars. Then he told the Israelites, "Weigh the hooks of the pillars."

The Israelites weighed the hooks, which were exactly the weight of the missing silver.

וַיְכַסּוּ הָעָם אֶת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, וַיְכַבֹּד יְיָ מֶלֶא אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן.



## 19. LEVITICUS [1-25]

### LAWS RELATING TO SACRIFICE

AND THE LORD [1] called [2] to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and say to them: When [3] any man [4] of you brings an offering to the Lord of the herd or of the flock, it shall be a male without blemish. And

when anyone brings a meal-offering, it shall be of fine flour."

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "If anyone sins and commits a trespass against the Lord, [5] and deals falsely with his neighbor in a matter of a deposit, or of pledge, or has robbed his neighbor [6] or has found something that was lost and denies it, and swears to

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[1] AND THE LORD: Why does Leviticus begin with "And"? The use of the conjunction shows the close connection between this book and Exodus, which recounts the establishment of the Jewish nation. Since a nation must develop a way of life and of worship, Leviticus deals mainly with sacrifice and priestly duties in the Sanctuary. The history in Exodus leads on to the worship and holiness in Leviticus.

וְאִם מִן הַצֹּאן קָרְבָּנוֹ מִן הַכֹּשֶׁבִּים אוֹ מִן הָעֵצִים לְעוֹלָה, זָכָר תָּמִים יִקְרִיבֵנוּ.

a lie; if he has sinned by doing any of all these, then when he is found guilty he shall restore what he took by robbery or by fraud, or what was deposited with him, or the lost article that he found, or anything about which he swore falsely. He shall restore it in full [7] and shall also add a fifth more to it, giving it to whom it belongs on the day he was found guilty. Then he shall bring a guilt-offering to the Lord, a perfect ram from his flock. And the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven."

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "If anyone of the House of Israel presents an offering, in order that it may be

accepted it shall be a perfect animal, without blemish. Anything blind, or maimed, or mutilated, or scabbed, or diseased, you must not offer to the Lord.

"And you shall observe My commandments and do them, as I am the Lord. And you shall not profane My holy name. I will be hallowed among the Children of Israel: I am the Lord who hallows you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the Lord."

#### FESTIVALS

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and

🔤 [2] VAYIKRA: The Hebrew name for the Book of Leviticus is *Vayikra*. In every manuscript of the Torah it is spelled with a tiny *aleph*. Why?

In ancient writings there were no spaces between words. When the last letter of one word was the same as the first letter of the next, as in this case, one letter might serve for both. Later, when words were separated by spaces, the scribes wrote the *aleph* of *Vayikra* in smaller size, to show that it had not occurred in previous manuscripts.

This profound respect for each letter of the Scriptures is why the Bible has come down to us in its pure, sacred form.

🔤 [3] WHEN: Why is the word "When" used to introduce the laws of sacrifice? The phrase might have read, "You shall bring a sacrifice."

As the Prophets and Rabbis pointed out, God does not command these offerings. The Hebrews were accustomed to sacrifice, which was the religious custom of the ancient East. God would accept a sacrifice offered in the proper spirit; He did not demand it.

וְנִקְדָּשְׁתִּי בַתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲנִי יְיָ מְקַדְּשְׁכֶם.

say to them: The appointed festivals of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy assemblies, these are My fixed seasons.

SABBATH [8]

“SIX DAYS SHALL work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete

☞ [4] WHEN ANY MAN: “Any man,” this verse says, not “an Israelite” or “Hebrew.” This indicates that anyone may bring an offering to the Lord. His faith, not his birth, is important to God.

The Hebrew word for “offering” is *korban*, which means “that which is brought near” to God. Whatever may bring man closer to God, be it sacrifice, prayer or charity, is a *korban*.

☞ [5] AGAINST THE LORD: Rabbi Akiba held that these three simple words were of utmost significance. A man who denies his oath or swears falsely denies God, who is witness, and also denies His teachings.

☞ [6] ROBBERY, FRAUD: The Rabbis maintained that robbery includes any injustice or trickery, whether or not it conforms to the letter of the law. For example, if a farmer reserved the corners of his fields for a poor relative, this was considered robbery, for it robbed other poor people of their share.

☞ [7] THE FIRST STEP: The first step in repentance for a wrong against a fellow man is restitution of what has been stolen or defrauded.

Without this first step, there is no true repentance. Neither prayer nor the Day of Atonement atones for the sin until the wronged man has been repaid and his forgiveness sought. Only then may the repentant sinner ask for God’s forgiveness.

☞ [8] AN EXTRA SOUL: The Sabbath is not merely a day of rest. Rabbi Simcon ben Lakish declared that every Jew receives an extra soul on that day. The delight of the Sabbath is so great that man’s soul expands to enjoy its holiness.

מוֹעֲדֵי יְיָ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אוֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ, אֵלֶּה הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי.



rest, a holy assembly; you shall not do any manner of work. [9] It is a Sabbath to the Lord [10] in all your dwellings." [11]

#### PESAH

"IN THE FIRST month, on the fourteenth

day of the month at dusk, is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Festival of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat *matzot*. [12] On the first day and on the seventh day you shall have a holy assembly; you shall do no manner of servile work."

🕯 [9] THE TASTE OF THE SABBATH: Emperor Antoninus dined with Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah, and was served a hot meal. The next Sabbath, the Rabbi served him a cold meal. "The cold meal was even better than the hot," the Emperor observed. "How is that possible?"

"We have a spice called Sabbath," replied the Rabbi, "which gives this food its savor."

"Give me some of this spice," requested the Emperor.

The Rabbi smiled. "For him who keeps the Sabbath, the spice works; for him who does not keep it, it does not work."

🕯 [10] THE SABBATH IS FOR MAN: Hillel was poor when he came from Babylonia to the academy of Shemaiah and Avtalion. When he lacked even the meager funds for his tuition, he climbed to the roof and listened to the discussion through the grate.

Although it was winter, and the snow began to fall, he remained in his place to listen. He was still lying there when the class came to an end.

When the two rabbis returned for prayer the next morning, Shemaiah said to Avtalion, "Brother, it is always light at this hour, but today the room is dark." Looking up, they saw a figure outlined on the grate. They rushed to the roof and found Hillel lying there, covered with snow. They lifted him from the grate and carried him inside.

Although it was the Sabbath, they lit a fire to warm him. "We break the Sabbath this time to save his life," they said, "so that he may observe many hundreds of Sabbaths."

אָמְרוּ: רָאוּ יָהּ לְחַלֵּל עָלָיו אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת.

## SHAVUOT

"WHEN YOU HAVE come into the land which I give to you, and shall reap its harvest, then you shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord that it may be accepted for you.

"And you shall count from the day after the day of rest, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the waving, seven full weeks, counting fifty days to the day after the seventh week. [13] And you shall proclaim a holy assembly; you shall do no manner of servile work. It is a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations."

## ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and say: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest to you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of the *Shofar*, a holy assembly. You shall do no manner of servile work.

"However, on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement; there shall then be a holy assembly, and you shall afflict your souls. [14] And you shall do no manner of work on that day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. [15] It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your

🕎 [11] A SABBATH FOR THE BEAST: Animals, too, are creatures of God and are entitled to a day of rest.

The Rabbis decreed, therefore, that on the Sabbath an ox is not to be locked in its stall all day, for this is not rest, but imprisonment. The ox must be allowed to pasture in the field.

🕎 [12] MATZOT—THE BREAD OF AFFLICTION: *Matzah* is known as *lehem oni*, the bread of the poor. Even he who is rich and happy should eat *matzah* on Pesah, to remind himself that there are those who are poor and unhappy, as were our ancestors who were enslaved in Egypt.

🕎 [13] COUNTING SEVEN TIMES SEVEN: "Why do we count the days between Pesah and Shavuot?" asked the Rabbis. "The giving of the Torah at Sinai was the whole purpose of the deliverance from Egypt," explained Maimonides. "We count the days from Pesah as one counts the days until his best friend comes to visit."

וְכָל מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, כִּי יוֹם כְּפוּרִים הוּא לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם  
לְפָנַי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of complete rest, and you shall afflict your souls. On the evening of the ninth day, from evening to evening, you shall keep your sabbath."

#### SUKKOT

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and say: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of Booths for seven days to the Lord. On the first day shall be a holy assembly; you shall do no manner of servile work.

"However, on the fifteenth day of the

seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall observe the feast of the Lord for seven days. On the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

"And on the first day you shall take the fruit of the beautiful citron tree, branches of the palm tree, and boughs of the broad-leaved tree, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.

"You shall dwell in booths seven days; [16] all the native-born in Israel shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I

🕍 [14] YOU SHALL AFFLICT YOUR SOULS: Our Rabbis say: "Afflict your souls" does not mean that you are to mistreat your body. We fast so that our attention may be directed on atonement. It is our souls we afflict as we consider our deeds in the year past.

🕍 [15] THE HEART ALSO MUST SMITE: Rabbi Israel Meir, the sage known as the *Hafetz Hāyīm*, commented on the tradition of beating one's breast when the sins are enumerated on Yom Kippur: "God does not forgive the sins of one who smites his heart, but He pardons those whose hearts smite them."

🕍 [16] DWELL IN BOOTHS: Why do we dwell in booths at the harvest season? Nahmanides, the Spanish commentator of medieval days, explained that the booths call to mind that our ancestors wandered in the wilderness. At harvest time we must not say in our pride, "This I achieved with my own strength." Just as it is God who redeemed our ancestors, so it is He who brings the harvest.

וְלִקְחֶתֶם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר, כַּפּוֹת תְּמָרִים וְעֵץ הָאֲזֵבֵיחַ עֲבוֹת וְעֵרְבֵי נָחַל.

brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.”

#### THE SABBATICAL YEAR

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, “When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath unto the Lord. [17] Six years you shall sow your field and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its produce. But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land; you shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. You shall not reap that which grows of itself of your harvest, and you shall not gather the grapes of your undressed

vine; it shall be a year of rest for the land.

“And the produce of the land at rest shall be food for all: for you and for your manservant and for your maidservant, and for the stranger who lives with you; for your cattle and for the beasts in your land.”

#### THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

“AND YOU SHALL count seven sabbaths of years, seven times seven years, forty-nine years. Then on the tenth day of the seventh month, on the Day of Atonement, you shall make proclamation with the blast of the *Shofar* throughout your land. [18] And you shall hallow the fif-

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❧ [17] THE EARTH RESTS: There were emperors who respected the Jewish Sabbatical year, and did not require the Jews to pay tribute, since they reaped no harvest. Both Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar recognized that it was a religious duty of the Jews to let the ground lie fallow. Roman emperors who hated Judaism demanded the tribute money, however.

The Rabbis ruled that the people must work the soil throughout the Sabbatical year, so that the Romans would have no excuse to sell them into slavery.

❧ [18] JUBILEE AND ATONEMENT: The year begins on Rosh Hashanah; the jubilee year with Yom Kippur. Both occasions celebrate human freedom: the Day of Atonement frees man from the slavery of sin, the jubilee from the slavery of poverty.

The blowing of the *Shofar* proclaimed both great freedoms.

וּבִשְׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ. שְׁדָךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר.

tieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a jubilee to you; and you shall return every man to his property and to his family.

"A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you; you shall not sow, neither reap that which grows by itself in it, nor gather the grapes of the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you.

"And if you sell anything to your neighbor, or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. According to the number of years after the jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of the crops he shall sell to you. If the years are many the price shall increase, and if the years are few the price shall diminish; for it is the number of crops that he sells to you. You shall not cheat one another; but you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God.

"And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is Mine, and you are strangers and settlers with Me.

"If your brother becomes poor, and sells some of his property, then shall his nearest kinsman come and redeem what his brother has sold. And if a man has

no one to redeem it, and he does well and has enough means to redeem it, let him count the years of its sale, and restore the gain to the man to whom he sold it and return to his property.

"But if he does not have sufficient means to get it back for himself, then the land he sold shall remain with the buyer until the year of jubilee, and in the jubilee he shall return to his property.

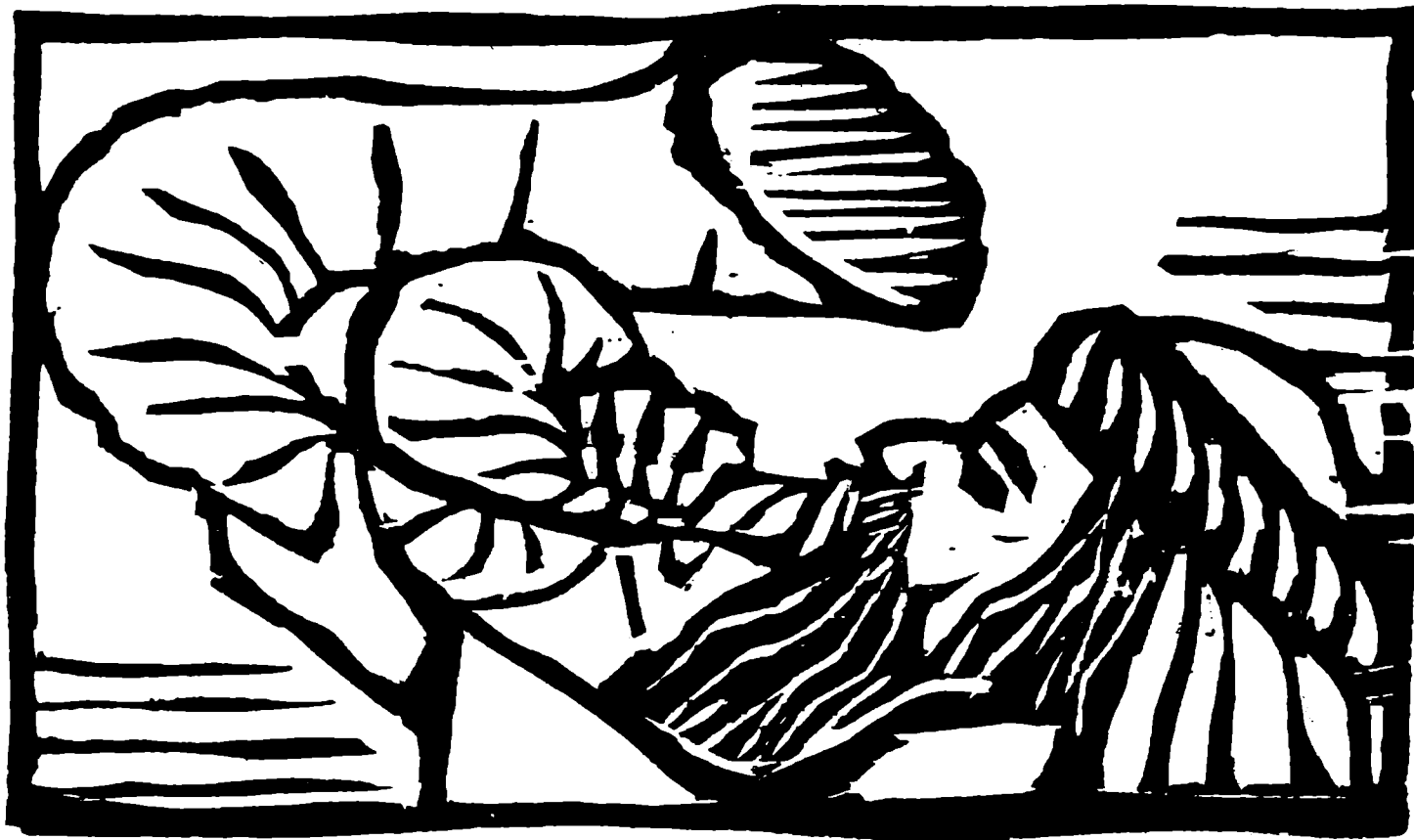
"If your brother becomes poor and his means fail, then you shall help him; as a resident alien and a settler he shall live with you. Take no interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you.

"If your brother becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave. [19] He shall be to you as a hired servant and as a settler; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. Then he shall be released from your service, he and his children with him, and shall return to his own family and to the property of his fathers. For the Children of Israel are My servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondmen. You shall not rule over him harshly; but you shall fear your God."

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🔗 [19] NOT SERVE AS A SLAVE: The Jews did not build their civilization on slavery. They remembered that they had been slaves in Egypt.

כִּי עֲבָדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם. לֹא יִמְכְּרוּ מִמִּכְרֹת עֶבֶד.



## 20. LEVITICUS [11-26]

THE HOLINESS CODE:

YOU ARE A HOLY PEOPLE

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying,  
“Speak to the whole congregation of  
the Children of Israel, and say to them:  
You shall be holy; for I, the Lord your

God, am holy. [1] Every man shall fear  
his mother and his father, and you shall  
keep My Sabbaths; I am the Lord your  
God.

“Do not turn to the idols nor make  
molten gods; for I am the Lord your  
God.

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[1] YOU SHALL BE HOLY: By imitating God, man can be holy. The Talmud points out those deeds of God which were holy. On the very first page of the Torah, for example, He clothes the naked—Adam. He feeds the hungry and cares for the orphans. He heals the sick and frees the captives. And on the last page we read that He buries Moses.

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger; I am the Lord your God."

#### BE RIGHTEOUS AND JUST

"YOU SHALL NOT steal; [2] neither shall you deal falsely nor lie one to another.

And you shall not swear by My name falsely, and so profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.

"You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him.

"The wages of a hired laborer [3] are not to remain with you over night until morning.

"You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block [4] before the blind, but you shall stand in awe before your God; I am the Lord.

"You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; neither shall you favor the

🔔 [2] YOU SHALL NOT STEAL: "One may not steal, even if everyone else steals, nor even to reclaim one's own property, lest he seem a thief," said the *Sifra*. Anything that has the appearance of stealing is forbidden.

Not always recognized as robbery, but to be condemned nonetheless, is *g'nevat da'at*, the stealing of someone's reputation, whether by gossip or slander, or by false flattery.

🔔 [3] A HIRED LABORER: The Torah commands that a hired laborer be treated justly. The Talmud required an employer to give his helpers time to recite the *Sh'ma*, a respite for his meals, and a pause to say *Birkat ha-Mazon*, Grace After Meals.

🔔 [4] A STUMBLING BLOCK: "A stumbling block" can mean bad advice. Do not send a man on a useless journey, or advise him to sell his field for a pittance, or recommend a house you know is not well built.

🔔 [5] FAVOR NOT THE POOR: Our Rabbis were careful to maintain the purest justice. Therefore they specified that, just as one may not

לֹא תִקְלֹל חֵרֶשׁ וְלִפְנֵי עֹזֵר לֹא תִתֵּן מִכְשׁוֹל, וְיִרְאֵת מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ, אֲנִי יי.

poor [5] nor defer to the mighty; in righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.

“You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people, neither shall you

stand idly by the bloodshed of your neighbor; [6] I am the Lord.

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall not take vengeance, [7] nor bear any grudge against your

favor the rich, neither may he favor the poor. Justice must be free of all prejudice. Favoritism to the needy not only turns aside justice, but also humiliates the poor.

Similarly, a judge may not allow one person to sit and force the other to stand; or address one man kindly and be harsh to the other. “Justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20).

🔔 [6] YOU SHALL NOT STAND IDLY BY: This verse warns against the sin of indifference, said the Rabbis. Whoever does not come to the aid of one who is drowning, pursued by a wild beast, or attacked by a robber, is himself guilty. His idleness allowed another to perish.

The verse ends, “I am the Lord,” to tell man that God knows of his indifference and weighs it as a sin.

🔔 [7] YOU SHALL NOT TAKE VENGEANCE: Vengeance means the paying of evil with evil. It is the Jewish way to fight evil, rather than the evildoer. This philosophy was illustrated by Samuel ibn Nagrela, the Spanish-Jewish poet of the eleventh century, who was vizier to the king of Granada.

One day, Samuel was cursed by an enemy in the presence of the king. The irate king ordered him to have the man’s tongue cut out. Samuel, however, did not take vengeance, but treated the man so kindly that he became a warm friend.

When the king observed that the man had not been mutilated, he expressed surprise. Samuel replied, “Your majesty, I have taken away his evil tongue and given him a kind one.”

The Rabbis say, therefore, “Who is mighty? He who makes his enemy his friend.”

בְּצֶדֶק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ.



people, [8] but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; [9] I am the Lord.

"You shall not eat anything with its blood; neither shall you practice divination nor soothsaying.

"You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old.

"And if a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourns with you shall be to you as the native-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.

"You shall do no injustice in weight or in measures. Just balances, just weights, a just *ephah*, and a just *hin*, shall you have; I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And you shall observe all My statutes and all My ordinances, and do them; I am the Lord.

"And you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I am casting out be-

fore you; for it was because they did all these things that I abhorred them. Therefore, sanctify yourselves and be holy; for I am the Lord your God, who sanctifies you."

#### A SEPARATE PEOPLE

"YOU SHALL THEREFORE keep all My statutes and all My ordinances, so that the land to which I bring you to dwell shall not spew you out. I am the Lord your God who has set you apart from the peoples. You shall therefore distinguish between the clean beast and the unclean, and between the unclean fowl and the clean.

"And you shall be holy to Me; for I, the Lord, am holy, and have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine."

#### ANIMALS, CLEAN AND UNCLEAR

"THESE ARE THE creatures which you

🔔 [8] AGAINST YOUR PEOPLE: Our Rabbis explain this verse with a parable: If a man cut his hand with a knife, shall he avenge himself by cutting his other hand which held the knife?

🔔 [9] YOU SHALL LOVE! Rabbi Akiba considered this the greatest verse of the Torah. Ben Azai, however, did not deem it sufficient only to love one's neighbor. The greatest verse is, "These are the generations of Adam" (Genesis 5:1), said he, "because it teaches that we are all children of the same father."

וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ.

may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Any with a cloven hoof, completely divided, and that chews its cud, you may eat. But those that only chew their cud, or those that have only a cloven hoof, you shall not eat. The camel, though it chews its cud, does not have a cloven hoof; it is unclean to you. And the pig, though it has a cloven hoof, does not chew its cud; it is unclean to you."

#### FISHES, CLEAN AND UNCLEAR

"THESE YOU MAY eat of all that live in the water: whatever has fins and scales in the water, in the seas and in the rivers, you may eat. But all that do not have fins and scales, they are detestable to you."

#### BIRDS AND INSECTS

"ALL BIRDS OF prey and every vulture are detestable; they shall not be eaten.

"All winged, swarming insects upon the earth are detestable to you.

"Whatever crawls on its belly, and whatever goes upon four legs, or whatever has many legs; any swarming insect on the earth, you shall not eat—they are detestable.

"For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. Therefore, you shall not defile yourself with any kind of swarming thing that crawls upon the earth."

#### BLOOD

"ANYONE IN THE House of Israel, or of the strangers that reside among you, who eats any blood at all, I will set My face against him and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of a creature is the blood; therefore I said to the Children of Israel: No one among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that resides among you eat blood."

#### THE BLESSINGS

"IF YOU WILL observe My statutes, and keep My commands and do them, then I will give you rains in due season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach to the grape-gathering, and the grape-gathering shall reach to the sowing time. And you shall eat your bread until you have enough, and dwell in your land in safety.

"And I will give peace in the land, so that you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid. I will clear the land of wild beasts, and no sword shall pass through your land.

"I will turn My face toward you, and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain My Covenant with you. And you shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall clear out the old to make room for the new.

וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ וּשְׁכֻבָתָם וְאֵין מַחֲרִיד.

“And I will set My Tabernacle among you. I will walk among you, and will be your God and you shall be My people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery; and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you walk upright.” [10]

#### THE REPROOF

“BUT IF YOU will not listen to Me and will not observe all these commandments, and if you will reject My statutes, and if your soul will abhor My ordinances and you break My Covenant, then I will do this to you: I will appoint terror over you; and you will sow your seed in vain, for your enemies will eat it. And I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies; and you shall flee when no one pursues you.

“And if you will not listen to Me even after this, then I will punish you seven more times for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heaven as iron and your earth as brass. And your strength shall be

spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

“And if you will not listen to Me in spite of these things, but will go contrary to Me, then I will act contrary to you in fury. And I will scatter you among the nations; and your land shall be a desolation and your cities shall be a waste.

“And those of you that are left, if they will confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, and their hearts will be humbled and they will make amends, then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and with Isaac, and with Abraham; and I will remember the land.

“For, nonetheless, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God.

“I will remember the covenant I made with your ancestors, whom I brought forth out of Egypt in the sight of the nations that I might be their God; I am the Lord.”

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🔗 [10] AND MADE YOU WALK UPRIGHT: How do we walk upright before God? By performing His commandments proudly and gladly, not as slaves serve their masters, but with joy and a full heart.

וְאִם גַּם זֹאת בְּהִיוֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אוֹיְבֵיהֶם, לֹא מֵאֲסָתִים וְלֹא גַעְלָתִים לְכָלֹותָם, לְהַפֵּר בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם.



## 21. NUMBERS [6-11]

### THE CLOUD AND THE FIRE OVER THE TABERNACLE IN THE DESERT

ON THE DAY that the Tabernacle was erected, the cloud covered the Tabernacle and the Tent of Meeting. And the appearance of fire was over the Tabernacle, from evening until morning. And whenever the cloud was lifted from over the Tent, all the Children of Israel journeyed; and wherever the cloud stopped, the Children of Israel camped. At the command of the Lord the Children of Israel journeyed, and at the command of the Lord they encamped.

At times the cloud would remain a

few days upon the Tabernacle; and sometimes the cloud remained from evening till morning only. Whether it remained two days, or a month, or a year, as long as the cloud remained over the Tabernacle, the Children of Israel remained in camp and did not journey; only when it lifted did they set out. At the command of the Lord they encamped, and at the command of the Lord they journeyed.

### THE TWO SILVER TRUMPETS

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Make two trumpets of silver of beaten

וּלְפִי הָעֲלוֹת הָעֵנָן מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן יִסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּבְמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֹּן-  
שֵׁם הָעֵנָן שָׁם יַחְנוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

work, and they shall be for calling the congregation and for starting the camps on the journey. When they shall blow both of them, the whole congregation shall gather at the door of the Tent of Meeting. And if they blow only one, the princes, the heads of the clans of Israel, shall gather to you.

“And when you blow an alarm, the camps that lie on the east side shall set out on their journey. And when you blow a second alarm, the camps that lie on the south side shall set out.

“The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets.

“And when you go to war in your land against an adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets; and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies.

“Also in the day of your gladness, and

on your designated festivals, and on the first day of the month, you shall blow the trumpets.”

#### THE JOURNEY BEGINS

AND IT CAME to pass in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, that the cloud was lifted from the Tabernacle of the Testimony, and the Children of Israel set out from the desert of Sinai. And they journeyed for three days, and the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord went before them to seek out a resting place for them.

And when the Ark set forward, Moses would say:

“Rise up, O Lord, [1] and let Thine  
enemies be scattered;  
And let them who hate Thee flee  
from before Thee!” [2]

❧ [1] RISE UP, O LORD: These two verses still convey the thrill of the march into the wilderness. They are pronounced to this day in traditional synagogues at the opening and closing of the Ark, when the Torah is read. When the ancient Jews went into battle, the Levites would bear the Ark before them and the priests would cry out, “Rise up, O Lord!”

Today these words are still a call to battle—to the battle against evil.

❧ [2] LET THEM WHO HATE THEE: Why have the Jews been able to endure persecution? They have recognized that there are men who hate decency and righteousness. Since the Jewish people brought

קוֹמָה יְיָ וַיִּפּוּצוּ אוֹיְבָיָהּ, וַיָּנוּסוּ מִשְׁנֵאֵיָהּ מִפְּנֵיָהּ.


And when the Ark would halt, he would say:  
"Return, O Lord, unto the ten thousands of the clans of Israel."

THE PRIESTLY BLESSING  
THE LORD SPOKE to Moses, saying,


"Speak to Aaron and his sons, and say: This is how you shall bless the Children of Israel; [3] say to them:  
The Lord bless you and guard you; [4]  
The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

God's word to mankind, those who hate His word must hate the Jews also. This realization has comforted the Jew in times of oppression.

Therefore, it is said that God is distressed whenever Jews suffer. It would be presumptuous to say that God suffers with the Jews, said Rabbi Akiba, if Scriptures did not record it: "You redeemed out of Egypt the nation and its God" (II Samuel 7:23). He Himself was in exile with the Hebrews.

 [3] YOU SHALL BLESS: Although Aaron has been told to bless Israel, the priestly blessing calls on God to bless them. Why? Moses understood that no man, priest though he be, can bless another. What he can do is ask God to bless.

Yet man, who cannot bless his fellow man, can bless God. This the Jew does every day in the *b'rahot*, every one of which begins "Blessed art Thou, O Lord . . ." How can this be? Man is responding to the holiness of God.

 [4] THE LORD BLESS YOU: This blessing is called *duchan*, a name taken from the wooden platform on which the priests stood in the Temple courtyard when they pronounced these words.

Even today, in traditional synagogues on Holy Days and Festivals, the *Kohanim*, the descendants of the priests, assemble in front of the Ark, cover their heads with their *Talétim*, lift their hands high and invoke God's blessing on the congregation, while chanting the Biblical words in an age-old melody.

Tradition says that we may not look upon the *Kohanim* as they in-

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְיָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ. יָאֵר יְיָ פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַחְנֶנְךָ.

The Lord lift up His countenance  
upon you and give you peace. [5]

So they shall put My Name upon the Children of Israel, and I will bless them."

#### THE PEOPLE COMPLAIN

AND THE PEOPLE complained. The rabble among them had a craving; and the Children of Israel also wept, and said, "If only we were given meat to eat! We remember the fish that we ate without payment in Egypt; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now our souls

are dried away. We have nothing but this manna to look to."

Moses heard the people weeping, family by family, every man at the door of his tent. And Moses became displeased, [6] and said to the Lord, "Why hast Thou been so hard on Thy servant? And why have I not found favor in Thy sight, that Thou hast put the burden of all these people upon me? Have I conceived them that Thou shouldst say to me: Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant, to the land which Thou hast promised to their fathers? Where can I get meat to give to all these people? They weep on my

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tone the ancient words, for if they are indeed holy and God-fearing men, the *Shechinah*, God's Presence, rests upon them; and, legend has it, we may be blinded by the radiance.

🕉 [5] AND GIVE YOU PEACE: Peace is perhaps the most important word in the Hebrew language. Because the wish for peace is so dear to us, we greet one another and take our leave with wishes for *shalom*. *Shalom* is even one of the great names of God.

Man can build a meaningful life only when there is peace: "Better a supper of herbs with love than a banquet with strife" (Proverbs 15:17).

The Midrash tells a story which shows that God seeks to keep peace in a household. Sarah overheard God tell Abraham that a son would be born to them, and she exclaimed, "How can I give birth to a child when I am old and my husband is old?" (Genesis 18:12). God repeated her remark to Abraham, but mentioned only her words, "When I am old" (18:13), lest Abraham be angered that Sarah had referred to him as old.

יְשָׁא יי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

shoulders, saying, 'Give us meat to eat!' I am not able to carry all of this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. If this is the way Thou wouldst deal with me, kill me, I pray Thee, and let me not look upon my wretchedness!"

#### THE SEVENTY ELDERS

AND THE LORD said to Moses, "Gather seventy of the elders of Israel, and bring them to the Tent of Meeting that they may stand there with you. And I will come down and speak with you there. And I will take of the spirit which is upon you and will put it upon them, that they may share the burden of the people with you, that you shall not bear it alone.

"And say to the people: Tomorrow you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, 'If only we were given meat to eat, for it was well with us in Egypt;' therefore the

Lord will give you meat to eat. You shall eat meat not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?' "

And Moses said, "The people are six hundred thousand, and yet Thou hast said, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month.' Can enough flocks and herds be slaughtered to suffice them? Or if all the fish of the sea were gathered together, would they suffice them?" And the Lord answered, "Is there a limit to the Lord's power? Now you shall see whether My word shall come to pass or not."

And Moses went out, and he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people [7] and set them around the Tent. And the Lord came down in the cloud,

☞ [6] MOSES BECAME DISPLEASED: Why was Moses so unhappy with the Children of Israel? Because he saw that small trials of the present loomed larger to them than the bitter oppression of the past. The Israelites had been slaves who labored the long day without pay, at the mercy of Egyptian masters who gave them barely enough food to keep them alive. All this they forgot, as they remembered only the taste of the fish.

☞ [7] SEVENTY ELDERS: Moses was in a predicament because he could not evenly apportion seventy elders among twelve tribes. If he took

הֵיךְ יִּתְקַצֵּר? עֲתָה תִּרְאֶה הִיָּקָרְךָ דְּבָרִי אִם לֹא.



and took of the spirit that was upon Moses, and put it upon the seventy elders. [8] And when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, but not after that day.

#### ELDAD AND MEDAD

NOW TWO MEN remained in the camp.

The name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. They were among the seventy men recorded, but they had not gone to the Tent. And the spirit rested upon them, and they prophesied in the camp. [9]

A young man came running to Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!"

five from each tribe, he would have only sixty elders; if he took six, he would have seventy-two. If he divided the honors unevenly, jealousy would result.

What did he do? He chose seventy-two worthy men, six from each tribe. He prepared seventy-two markers, two of which were blank. Each man chose a slip, and the two who had drawn blanks were not appointed.

🔥 [8] AND TOOK THE SPIRIT OF MOSES: Do not think, said the Rabbis, that when others prophesied, Moses' prophetic spirit was diminished. Prophecy may be compared to a candle. Many candles may be kindled from it, and though all will blaze into light, the original flame is not diminished.

🔥 [9] AND THEY PROPHESED IN THE CAMP: What did Eldad and Medad prophesy? Our Rabbis declared that they prophesied, "Moses will die in the wilderness and Joshua will lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land."

Joshua was shocked when he heard of this, and asked Moses for permission to arrest the men.

Moses answered, "God has put His spirit upon them, and they prophesy what He has put into their mouths. Why should they be punished?"

Throughout Jewish history, the Hebrew Prophets spoke the truth, despite any threat, despite any danger.

מֹשֶׁה מֵת, יְהוֹשֻׁעַ מְכַנֵּס אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֶרֶץ.

And Joshua the son of Nun, who had served Moses from his youth, answered, "My lord Moses, shut them in!"

And Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all of the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit on them!"

And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

#### THE QUAILS

THEN A WIND arose and brought quails

from the sea, and let them fall near the camp, about a day's journey on each side, all around the camp, and about three feet high on the face of the earth. And all that day and all the night and all the next day, the people gathered the quail; he who gathered the least gathered ten heaps. And they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

While the meat was still between their teeth, a great plague smote the people.

וּמִי יִתֵּן כָּל עַם יְיָ נְבִיאִים, כִּי יִתֵּן יְיָ אֶת רוּחוֹ עַל־יָהֶם.



## 22. NUMBERS [12-22]

### MEN APPOINTED TO EXPLORE CANAAN

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL camped in the wilderness of Paran. And the Lord spoke

to Moses, saying, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, [1] which I am giving to the Children of Israel. Send one man from every tribe, every one a prince among them."

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[1] SENDING THE SPIES: Why did God tell Moses to send spies who, He knew, would bring back a false report? The Rabbis declared that the Israelites had demanded that spies be sent to Canaan. They said to Moses, "Let us send men to search out the land, to see whether the land is good."

When Moses spoke of this to God, He answered, "These are people of little faith! Were I to forbid them to send scouts, they would say it is because the land is not good! Therefore, Moses, choose twelve men to spy out Canaan, although this people is not ready to inherit the land."

שְׁלַח-לָךְ אֲנָשִׁים וִיִּתְּרוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

And Moses sent twelve men, all of them heads of the Children of Israel. And Moses said to them, "Go up into the Negev and into the mountains; and see what the land is like, and the people who live there: are they strong or weak? Are they few or many? And see what the land is like; is it good or bad? And the kind of cities in which they live: are they open camps or fortified cities? Is the land fat or lean, wooded or not? And do your best to bring of the fruit of the land." [2] The season was that of the first ripe grapes.

So they went up and scouted the land, from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob. And they went into the Negev and came to Hebron. And they came to the valley of Eshcol, and cut a branch there with only one cluster of grapes, and they had to carry it upon a pole between two men. They also took some pomegranates and some figs.

They returned from scouting the land

at the end of forty days. And they came to Moses and to Aaron and to all the congregation of Israel, in the wilderness of Paran at Kadesh, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they said, "We came to the land to which you sent us, and surely it flows with milk and honey; and this is its fruit. However, the people that live in the land are fierce, and the cities are fortified and very great; and besides, we saw the children of Anak [giants] there."

And Caleb, the head of the tribe of Judah, silenced them and said, "We should go up at once and possess it, for we can certainly overcome it."

But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." And they spread an evil report about the land which they had explored, saying, "The land through which we have passed is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people we saw

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✎ [2] THE INSTRUCTION OF MOSES: Moses instructed the spies: "Surely God will protect you, but do not bring upon yourselves needless danger. When you come to a city, do not slink in, but walk in and say that you wish to buy grapes and pomegranates.

"Observe the people carefully. If you find them dwelling in open cities, know that they are mighty warriors, for they depend upon their own strength, and have no fear. If, however, they live in fortified cities, they are weak and need the protection of walls.

"Bring of the fruit of the land, that our people may see it with their own eyes, and judge it."

עַל־הַנֶּחֱלָה וַיִּרְשְׁנוּ אוֹתָהּ כִּי יָכוֹל נוֹכַל לָהּ.

are men of great stature. And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, and we seemed to ourselves as grasshoppers, [3] and looked the same to them."

Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried; and the people wept that night. [4] And all the Children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron; and they said, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would we had died in this wilderness! Why does the Lord bring us to this land to fall by the sword? Our

wives and our little ones will be a prey; would it not be better for us to return into Egypt?" And they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain and return to Egypt!"

Then Joshua and Caleb, who were among those that had spied out the land, tore their clothes. And they said to all the congregation of the Children of Israel, "The land which we explored is a very good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. If the Lord is pleased with us, He will bring us into this land

☞ [3] WE WERE AS GRASSHOPPERS: Why did the spies return with an unfavorable report? They had carried back the largest, most luscious fruit any of them had ever seen, and God had promised them Canaan, a green and fertile land.

The answer is simply that they were afraid. Although Joshua was to conquer them in forty years, the inhabitants were many and strong, and their appearance was frightening to the timid ex-slaves.

The spies did not doubt the beauty or the fertility of the land; they doubted themselves, and the Hebrew people. Therefore, they made the Canaanites seem even bigger and fiercer than they were.

☞ [4] A NIGHT OF TEARS: The spies tried various tactics. They went to their tents, put on sackcloth and began to weep bitterly. When their children asked why they were mourning, each gave the answer, "Woe is me, my children! Know that we are all doomed to be slain by the Canaanites. And only by reason of Moses' obstinacy!"

At these words, all the household began to wail. The neighbors came, and heard what the spy had said. Soon, "all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried; and the people wept that night."

In the morning they demanded of Moses, "Let us choose a captain and return to Egypt."

הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר עָבְרָנוּ בָּהּ לְתוֹר אוֹתָהּ טוֹבָה הָאָרֶץ מְאֹד מְאֹד, אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הִיא  
זֹבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ.

and give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land; for they are bread for us. Their shadow has departed from them, [5] and the Lord is with us. Fear them not!"

But the whole congregation was ready to stone them, when the glory of the Lord appeared to all the Children of Israel in the Tent of Meeting.

And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will this people despise Me? And how long will they not believe in Me despite all the wonders which I have worked among them? I will smite them with pestilence and destroy them, but I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

And Moses said to the Lord, "When the Egyptians shall hear that Thou shalt kill this people as one man, they will say: Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which He promised them, therefore He has slain them in the wilderness. Now show Thy greatness, for Thou hast said: The Lord is slow to anger and full of lovingkindness, forgiving sins and wrongdoing. Pardon, I pray Thee, the sin of this people according to the greatness of Thy lovingkindness, as Thou hast forgiven this people since Thou didst bring them out of Egypt until now."

And the Lord said, "I have pardoned as you ask. But as surely as I live, and

❧ [5] THEIR DEFENSE HAS DEPARTED: Jewish teaching has always stressed that Jews are not the only righteous. Noah is an outstanding example of a righteous non-Jew, and Job, the suffering servant of God, another.

Our Sages maintained that Job dwelt in Canaan, and that the spies were ordered to inquire if he was still alive. If not, the Israelites need not fear the Canaanites, as there was not among them one pious man whose merits might shield them. When the spies reached the land, they found that Job had just died, and there was no longer a righteous man to protect Canaan.

This echoes the Talmudic tale of the travelers who came to a town and asked for the *neturé karta*, the "protectors of the city." When they were taken to the armed watchmen, the travelers said, "This is not what we mean." At length they were shown the teachers and the children studying Torah. "These are the protectors of the city," the visitors said. "Unless the Lord guard the city, the watchman wakes but in vain" (Psalms 127:1).

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ: סֶלְחֵתִי כְּדַבַּרְךָ.

as the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, those men who have seen My glory and My wonders which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have not listened to Me, surely they shall not see the land which I promised to their fathers. All of you from twenty years up, you who have muttered against Me, surely you shall not enter the land in which I promised to settle you, except Caleb and Joshua.

"But your little ones, that you said would become prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and your children shall be wanderers in the wilderness for forty years."

And Moses told this to all the Children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly.

And the men whom Moses had sent

to spy out the land, and who had spread an evil report, died by the plague. But Joshua and Caleb remained alive.

#### FRINGES

THE LORD SPOKE to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and bid them to make fringes [6] on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and they shall put a thread of blue [7] in the fringe at each corner.

"When you look at it you will remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and will not go astray by following the inclinations of your heart and your eyes. Thus may you remember and carry out all My commandments, and be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the Lord your God."

🔗 [6] FRINGES AND SLAVERY: What has Egypt to do with the fringes on garments? And why should fringes be worn?

Long garments with fringes, especially in the costly blue dye, were the garb of free men. Slaves wore short robes without ornaments that might interfere with their work.

When the Hebrews stood before God, they would stand as free men.

🔗 [7] THREAD OF BLUE: There is no longer a blue thread among the fringes of the *Talit*. The blue dye, which was derived from a mollusk found near the coast of Phoenicia, was rare and costly. The Rabbis agreed, therefore, that white wool thread alone would suffice.

וְרֵאִיתֶם אוֹתוֹ, וְזָכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת יְיָ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אוֹתָם, וְלֹא תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶּם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם.

## KORAH'S REBELLION

NOW KORAH, [8] of the tribe of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram and On, of the tribe of Reuben, [9] became rebellious, and they took with them two hundred and fifty men, leaders of the congregation. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much authority! All the congregation are holy, [10] since the Lord is among them.

Why do you raise yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

When Moses heard this he bowed low. [11] And he said to Korah and to all his company, "Hear, you sons of Levi: is it a small thing that the God of Israel has singled you out from the community of Israel, to do the service at the Tabernacle of the Lord, to stand before the congregation and minister to them, that you should seek priesthood also? For this you and all your company have

✎ [8] KORAH: "And Korah took . . ." The Hebrew text does not immediately specify what Korah took. The Midrash Tanḥuma said that he took himself and separated himself from the congregation. In fact, the ancient Aramaic translation of the text renders the first words as, "And Korah separated himself."

✎ [9] REUBEN: Why was the tribe of Reuben, and no other, implicated with Levi? They were encamped next to the tribe of Levi, and thus were influenced by them. As Rashi says (Numbers 16:1), "Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbor."

✎ [10] ALL ARE HOLY: Korah, like all who rebel with no cause, contradicts himself. First he maintains that Israel needs no leaders, since all Israel is holy and God is among them. Then we discover that Korah and his Levite followers wish to replace Aaron and the *Kohanim* in the Tabernacle worship. In effect, they say they wish no leaders but themselves.

✎ [11] MOSES BOWED LOW: Why did Moses seem to give up when faced with Korah's rebellion? Moses had pleaded for the rebellious Hebrews three times before, but now he felt himself powerless.

This may be compared to the story of a prince who disobeyed his

אוי לרשע ואוי לשכנו.



gathered together against the Lord? And what has Aaron done that you should grumble against him?"

And Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, but they said, "We will not go up! [12] Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, but must you also make yourself a ruler over us? Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Are you trying to deceive these men? We will not come up!"

And Moses was angered, and said to the Lord, "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken a single donkey from them, neither have I done harm to any of them."

Korah assembled the whole congregation against Moses and Aaron at the door of the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord appeared.

And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Separate yourselves from this congregation that I may destroy them immediately!"

Then they fell upon their faces and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, wilt Thou be angry with all the congregation?"

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the congregation, saying: Withdraw from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram!"

And Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away because of their sins."

So they left the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

And Moses said, "By this shall you know that the Lord has sent me to do all these deeds, and that I have not done

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father. A friend had pleaded with the angry king to forgive his son. Three times the king heeded the friend, but when the prince offended the fourth time, the friend felt himself powerless.

🔥 [12] WE WILL NOT GO UP: Moses asked Dathan and Abiram to come to him that they might discuss the situation. The two rebels took his request as a formal summons and replied, "We will not go up." They did not recognize him as their leader.

Moses was hurt that they would not so much as talk with him, so he himself went to them.

אֶל תִּפְּנֵן אֶל מִנְחָתָם. לֹא תִמּוֹר אֶחָד מֵהֶם נִשְׁאָתִי וְלֹא הִרְעֵתִי אֶת אֶחָד מֵהֶם.

them of my own mind. If these men die as all men die, and suffer the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord does something unheard-of, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all they possess, and they go down alive into the pit, then you shall know that these men despised the Lord."

As he finished saying these words, the ground under them split open. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with all the men who followed Korah, and all their goods. And the earth closed upon them, and they perished from the community.

And all Israel that were round about them fled, for they said, "The earth might swallow us!"

#### AARON'S ROD BLOSSOMS

BUT ON THE next day the whole congregation of the Children of Israel grum-

bled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "It is you who have slain the people of the Lord!" [13]

When the congregation assembled against Moses and Aaron, they looked toward the Tent of Meeting, and there was the cloud covering it, and the glory of the Lord appeared.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and take a rod from each tribe, twelve rods in all. And you shall write every man's name upon his rod, and Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi. And you shall place them in the Tent of Meeting before the Ark, where I meet with you. And the rod of the man whom I choose shall blossom; [14] and thus will I stop the grumbling of the Children of Israel."

Moses spoke to the Children of Israel, and they gave him one rod for every one of their princes of their tribes, twelve rods in all; and Aaron's rod was among theirs.

☞ [13] YOU HAVE SLAIN: "Moses and Aaron asked God to punish Korah and his followers because they felt personally insulted," the people said. They did not recognize that Korah's rebellion had threatened the whole structure of the Israelites, as well as their role as bearers of the Torah. If Korah had prevailed, Israel would have become obscure desert tribes with no purpose.

☞ [14] HIS ROD SHALL BLOSSOM: The tribe whose rod blossoms will have within it the seed for the future flowering and fruit-bearing of all the people.

וַתִּפְתַּח הָאֲרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַע אוֹתָם וְאֶת בְּתֵיהֶם, וְאֶת כָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר לְקָרַח  
וְאֶת כָּל הָרְכוּשׁ.

And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting.

On the next day, when Moses entered the Tent, he found that the rod of Aaron for the tribe of Levi had budded, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds. [15]

And Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to the Children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the Ark, to keep there as a sign for the rebellious men, that there may be made an end of their grumbling against Me, that they may not die."

And Moses did just as the Lord commanded him.

#### MOSES STRIKES THE ROCK

THE PEOPLE CAMPED in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.

And there was no water for the congregation, and they assembled against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses, saying, "Why

have you brought the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness to die, we and our cattle? Why have you made us come up out of Egypt to this evil place? There is no grain, nor figs, nor vines, nor pomegranates; there is not even water to drink!"

And Moses and Aaron went from the congregation to the door of the Tent of Meeting, and fell upon their faces; and the glory of the Lord appeared to them.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Take the rod and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother. Speak to the rock in the presence of all the congregation, so that it will give forth water; and you shall bring forth water out of the rock, so you shall give drink to the congregation and their cattle."

And Moses took the rod from its place before the Lord. Then Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation before the rock, and he said, "Hear, you rebels! Shall we bring water for you out of the rock?"

And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice; and

☞ [15] WHY ALMONDS? The almond tree is the first to blossom and mature in the land of Israel. All the other trees soon follow. This indicates that Aaron and the Levites were not favored over the rest of the Israelites. They will merely lead the way, the others will follow them and attain the same spiritual level.

שָׁמְעוּ נָא הַמּוֹרִים – הֲמֵן הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה נּוֹצִיא לָכֶם מַיִם? וַיָּרֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ וַיַּךְ  
אֶת הַסֵּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ פַּעַמַּיִם.

water gushed out, and the congregation and their cattle drank.

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in Me enough to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

These are the Waters of Meribah: that is, the place where the Children of Israel quarreled with the Lord.

#### ON THE BORDERS OF EDMO

THEN MOSES SENT messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom: "Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the hardship that has befallen us; how our fathers went down into Egypt, and we dwelt there a long time; and the Egyptians treated us badly. And when we cried to the Lord, He heard our voice, and sent an angel, and brought us forth out of Egypt. Behold, we are in Kadesh, a city on your border. Let us pass, we pray you, through your land. We will not pass through field or through vineyard, neither will we drink the water of your wells. We will go along the king's highway, turning neither to the right nor to the left, until we have passed your border."

And Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through me, or I will come out with the sword against you."

And the Children of Israel said to him, "We will go up only by the highway; and if we drink of your water, we and our cattle, we will pay for it. Only let us pass through on foot; there is no harm in it."

But he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out against them with many people and with a strong hand.

Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border. Therefore Israel turned aside.

#### AARON DIES AT MOUNT HOR

THEY JOURNEYED from Kadesh, and the whole congregation of Israel came to Mount Hor. And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor, near the border of the land of Edom, saying, "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter into the land which I have given to the Children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the Waters of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar, his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor. And strip Aaron of his robes, and put them on Eleazar, his son; and Aaron shall be gathered to his people and shall die there."

Then Moses did as the Lord commanded, and they ascended Mount Hor before the eyes of the whole community. Moses stripped Aaron of his robes and

יֵעַן לֹא הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לָכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת הַקָּהָל  
הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם.

put them on Eleazar, his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain, and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.

And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, the whole house of Israel wept for Aaron thirty days. [16]

#### THE WARS AGAINST SIHON AND OG

THEN ISRAEL SENT messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, [17] saying, "Let me pass through your land; we will not turn aside into field or into vineyard; we will not drink the water of your wells.

🕊 [16] THE WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL WEPT: It is written that when Moses died, "the Children of Israel wept for Moses." At Aaron's death, however, "the whole house wept."

This shows, said our Sages, that only part of the people mourned for Moses, whereas all wept for Aaron. Aaron was the peacemaker. When he saw two people quarreling, he spoke to each separately, saying, "You do not know how the man you quarreled with regrets his action!" As a result, when the quarrelers met, they greeted each other as friends.

When Aaron heard that someone was transgressing God's precepts, he went out of his way to see him often. He greeted him cordially, and talked to him as a friend. His kindness led many evildoers to change their ways; for if such a one was tempted to sin, he would think to himself, "If I do this, how will I be able to talk with my friend Aaron and not blush with shame?"

Many marriages were saved by Aaron. If he heard of discord between husband and wife, Aaron talked with each alone, and made peace between them. The Israelites so revered him that no less than eighty thousand boys bore the name Aaron, in honor of the High Priest who valued peace above all else. He was known not only as Ohev Shalom (Lover of Peace), but also as Rodef Shalom (Pursuer of Peace).

But Moses was leader and lawgiver. It was he who forced the Children of Israel to change their lives, to forgo the fleshpots of Egypt, and to learn to live as a free people. He was the one who judged the guilty; and in so doing he made enemies.

אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם.

We will go by the king's highway until we have passed your border."

But Sihon did not permit Israel to pass through his border. Sihon gathered all his forces together and went out against Israel into the wilderness. And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok.

And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan; and Og, the king of Bashan, went out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei.

Og, the king of Bashan, was the only

one who remained of the Rephaim, the giants; behold, his bedstead was of iron, nine cubits long and four cubits wide!

And the Lord said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him and all his people and all his land into your hand. You will do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites."

So the Children of Israel smote Og and his sons and all his people, and they possessed his land.

And the Children of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab on the other side of the Jordan, near Jericho.

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🔗 [17] MESSENGERS OF PEACE: At first God said to Moses, "I have given in your hand Sihon, the Amorite, and his land. Begin the conquest."

Moses, however, sent messengers of peace to Sihon, saying, "Let me pass through your land; we shall not turn aside."

God was pleased at this. "Though I told you to start the war immediately, you sent messengers of peace to Sihon. I will affirm your action in law. Therefore, write in the Torah: When you draw near a city to fight against it, you first shall offer it peace" (Deuteronomy 20:10).

This law had to be observed even toward the Canaanite nations whom God had commanded to be utterly destroyed. Our Sages say that Joshua wrote to all the inhabitants of Canaan, "Whosoever would migrate from here to another country, let him do so. Whosoever would make peace with us, with him we shall make peace. And whosoever would war on us, let him know that we are ready."

The Girgashites chose to leave Canaan, and God gave them in exchange a land as good. The Gibeonites offered peace, and the Children of Israel did not smite them. The other thirty-one kings of Canaan made war against Israel and were destroyed.

אֶל תִּירָא אוֹתוֹ כִּי בְיָדְךָ נִתְּתִי אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת כָּל עַמּוֹ וְאֶת אֶרְצוֹ.



## 23. NUMBERS [22-24]

### BALAAM

BALAK, THE KING of Moab, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was in great fear of the Israelites because they were many. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this multitude will lick clean all that is round about us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field."

So Balak sent messengers to Balaam, [1] the son of Beor, at Pethor, by the Euphrates River, to call him, saying, "Behold, there is a people who have come out of Egypt! They cover the face of the earth and they are settled opposite me. Now come and curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land;

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[1] BALAAM, A HEATHEN PROPHET: All humanity are God's children, and God has sent sages and prophets to all the nations.

Balaam was one of the pagan prophets, as were Job and Jethro. All were descendants of Abraham's brother, Nahor.

The Prophets of Israel felt compassion for all nations. Jeremiah

וַעֲתָה לְכָה נָא אֶרֶה לִי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי עֲצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי. אוֹלֵי אוֹכֵל נֹכַח בּוֹ  
וַאֲגַרְשֵׁנוּ מִן הָאָרֶץ.

for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

And the elders of Moab and of Midian departed, and came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak. And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will give you an answer, as the Lord may speak to me." [2] So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

And God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?"

And Balaam said to God, "Balak, king of Moab, has sent them to me, saying: Behold, the people that has come out

of Egypt cover the face of the earth. Come now and curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and shall drive them out."

And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed."

So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, [3] for the Lord bade me not to go with you."

Then the princes of Moab left, and came to Balak and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

And Balak sent princes again, more

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said, "Therefore, I will wail for Moab; yea, I will cry out for all Moab" (48:31).

Ezekiel prophesied, "And you, son of man, take up a lamentation for Tyre" (27:2).

Balaam, however, was willing to curse a whole nation for his own gain.

🔪 [2] THE LORD MAY SPEAK TO ME: When the messengers came to Balaam, he was eager to accompany them, for he hoped to be richly rewarded. But God revealed Himself to him in a dream and said, "Do not go with them!"

"May I curse the Israelites from here?" Balaam inquired.

"You shall not curse them from here," God replied.

To curry favor with God, Balaam then asked, "Shall I bless them?"

"They need neither your honey nor your sting," was the reply.

🔪 [3] GO BACK TO YOUR LAND: Balaam did not tell the messengers that God had forbidden him to curse Israel. He reported only, "the Lord bade me not to go with you." Balak assumed that Balaam would not

לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם; לֹא תֵאָר אֶת הָעַם כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא.



in number and more distinguished than the others. And they came to Balaam and said, "Thus said Balak: Do not refuse to come to me, for I will reward you with very great honor, and whatever you say to me I will do; come and curse this people for me."

But Balaam answered, "If Balak would give me his house filled with silver and gold, I could not go against the word of the Lord, my God. But stay here this night, that I may know what else the Lord will speak to me."

And God came to Balaam at night and said, "If the men have come to call you, arise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do."

#### BALAAM'S DONKEY

SO BALAAM ROSE in the morning and saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was

aroused because he went; and the angel of the Lord placed himself on the road to obstruct him. He rode on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.

Then the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing on the road, with his drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside and went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back to the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards. And the donkey saw the angel of the Lord and she pressed herself against the wall, and thrust Balaam's foot against the wall. And Balaam struck her again.

The angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn either right or left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled and he struck the donkey with his staff.

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accompany the messengers because they were not important enough, so he sent men of higher rank. To these, also, Balaam declared that he could not defy the Lord; yet he did not impart the full truth. The messengers gathered that he desired a greater reward. Balaam revealed his greed when he mentioned a house filled with silver.

In the night, God spoke once more to Balaam, "You wish to go to Moab because you expect to be rewarded. Go then, but speak only the words I say."

Man has free will. Our Sages say, "God permits man to go upon the road he chooses to travel."

אם יִתֵּן-לִי בָּלָק מְלֹא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוֹכֵל לַעֲבֹר אֶת פִּי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי.

Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me three times?"

And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have mocked me! If I had a sword in my hand now, I would kill you!"

And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey upon which you have ridden all your life long until this day? Was I disposed to act this way to you?" And Balaam said, "No."

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed his head and fell on his face.

And the angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey three times? It was I who obstructed the road; and the donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would have killed you but let her live."

And Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned; for I did not know that you stood in the way against me. Now, if it displeases you, I will go back."

But the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, "Go with the men; but only the word that I say to you shall you speak."

So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

## BALAAM BLESSES THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

WHEN BALAK HEARD that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him. And Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send for you urgently? Why did you not come to me? Did you think I am not able to honor you?"

And Balaam said, "See, I have come to you; but do I have power to speak anything? Only the word that God puts in my mouth shall I speak."

The next morning Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into Bamoth-baal, and from there he saw the border of the people [Israel]. And Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare for me seven bullocks and seven rams."

And Balak did as Balaam said; and Balak and Balaam offered on each altar a bullock and a ram. Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here by your burnt-offering and I will go; perhaps the Lord will meet me, and whatever He reveals to me I will tell you."

So he went alone. And God met Balaam, and put a message in his mouth and said, "Return to Balak and thus you shall speak."

And Balaam returned and found Balak standing by his burnt-offering, with all the princes of Moab. And Balaam took up his message and said:

וַיִּפְתָּח יְיָ אֶת פִּי הָאֶתּוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבַלְעָם: מָה עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ כִּי הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ  
רָגְלִים?

"From Aram Balak brings me,  
The king of Moab, from the  
mountains of the East:  
Come, curse Jacob for me,  
Come, speak Israel's doom.

"How shall I curse whom God has  
not cursed?  
How can I doom whom the Lord  
has not doomed?  
From the top of the rocks I see him,  
From the hills I behold him.  
Behold, it is a people that  
dwell apart,  
Not to be reckoned among the  
nations.

"Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
Or number the stock of Israel?  
May I die the death of the  
righteous,  
And may my end be like his!"

And Balak said to Balaam, "What  
have you done to me? I brought you to  
curse my enemies, but you have blessed  
them!"

And Balaam answered, "Must I not  
take heed, to speak what the Lord puts  
in my mouth?"

Then Balak said to him, "Come with  
me to another place from which you  
may see only part of them, and curse  
them for me from there." And he took  
him to the summit of Sedeh-zophim,

and built there seven altars, and offered  
up a bullock and a ram on every altar.  
Then Balaam said, "Stand here by your  
burnt-offering, while I go to meet Him  
yonder."

And the Lord met Balaam and put a  
message in his mouth, and said, "Return  
to Balak and thus you shall speak." So  
he returned to Balak, who stood by his  
burnt-offering with the princes of Moab.  
And Balaam said:

"Arise, Balak, and hear!  
Give ear to me, son of Zippor:  
God is not a man, that  
He should lie,  
Nor a human being, that He should  
change His mind.  
What He has said, will He not do?  
And when He has spoken, will He  
not fulfill?

"Behold, I am bidden to bless,  
And when He has blessed, I cannot  
reverse it.  
No one has seen iniquity in Jacob,  
Neither has any one seen evil in  
Israel.  
The Lord his God is with him,  
And the acclaim of the King is  
among them."

Then Balak said to Balaam, "Neither  
curse them nor bless them." But Balaam  
answered and said, "Did I not say to

מָה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבֵּה אֵל, וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זַעַם יִי?

you: All that the Lord speaks, that I must do?"

And Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God if you curse them for me from there."

And Balak took Balaam to the summit of Peor, that overlooks the wilderness. And Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare for me seven bullocks and seven rams." So Balak did as Balaam said, and offered up a bullock and a ram on every altar.

When Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he turned his face toward the wilderness. And he saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe; and the spirit of God came upon him. And he lifted his voice, and said:

"The saying of Balaam, the son of Beor,  
The saying of the man whose eye  
is opened,

The saying of one who hears the  
words of God,  
Who sees the vision of the  
Almighty,  
Prostrate, yet with opened eyes:  
How goodly are your tents,  
O Jacob,  
Your dwellings, O Israel! [4]

"As valleys stretched out,  
As gardens by the riverside,  
As aloes planted by the Lord,  
As cedars beside the water;  
Water shall flow from his branches,  
And his seed shall be in many  
waters.

"He crouched, he lay down as a lion,  
And as a lioness; who shall rouse  
him?  
Blessed be those who bless you,  
Cursed be those who curse you!"

Now Balak's anger blazed against

✍ [4] BALAAM'S BLESSING: Balaam had intended to curse the Israelites, but when he saw their encampment stretched in orderly rows before him, the spirit of God came upon him, and he raised his voice in blessing.

So the Rabbis interpret Balaam's words, "your tents, O Jacob," to mean the synagogues; "your dwellings, O Israel," the houses of study. From this we learn that when Israel lives in peace, studying God's Torah and living by His teaching, even the greedy prophet must stand and praise.

מֶה טֹבוֹ אֶהְיֶיהָ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיהָ יִשְׂרָאֵל!

Balaam, and he struck his fists together; and he said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and you have blessed them three times. Therefore flee to your home! I had planned to honor you greatly, but the Lord has kept you back from honor."

And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me: If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord to do either good or bad of my own mind. What the Lord speaks, that will I speak. And now, as I return to my people, let me tell you what this people will do to your people in days to come:

"I see them, but not as of now;  
I behold them, but not in the near  
future;  
A star shall step forth out of Jacob,  
And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel,  
And shall strike through the brow  
of Moab,  
And break down all the sons  
of Seth.  
And Edom shall become a  
possession,  
But Israel will do valiantly,  
And Jacob shall conquer his  
enemies."

Then Balaam arose and returned home. [5] And Balak also went his way.

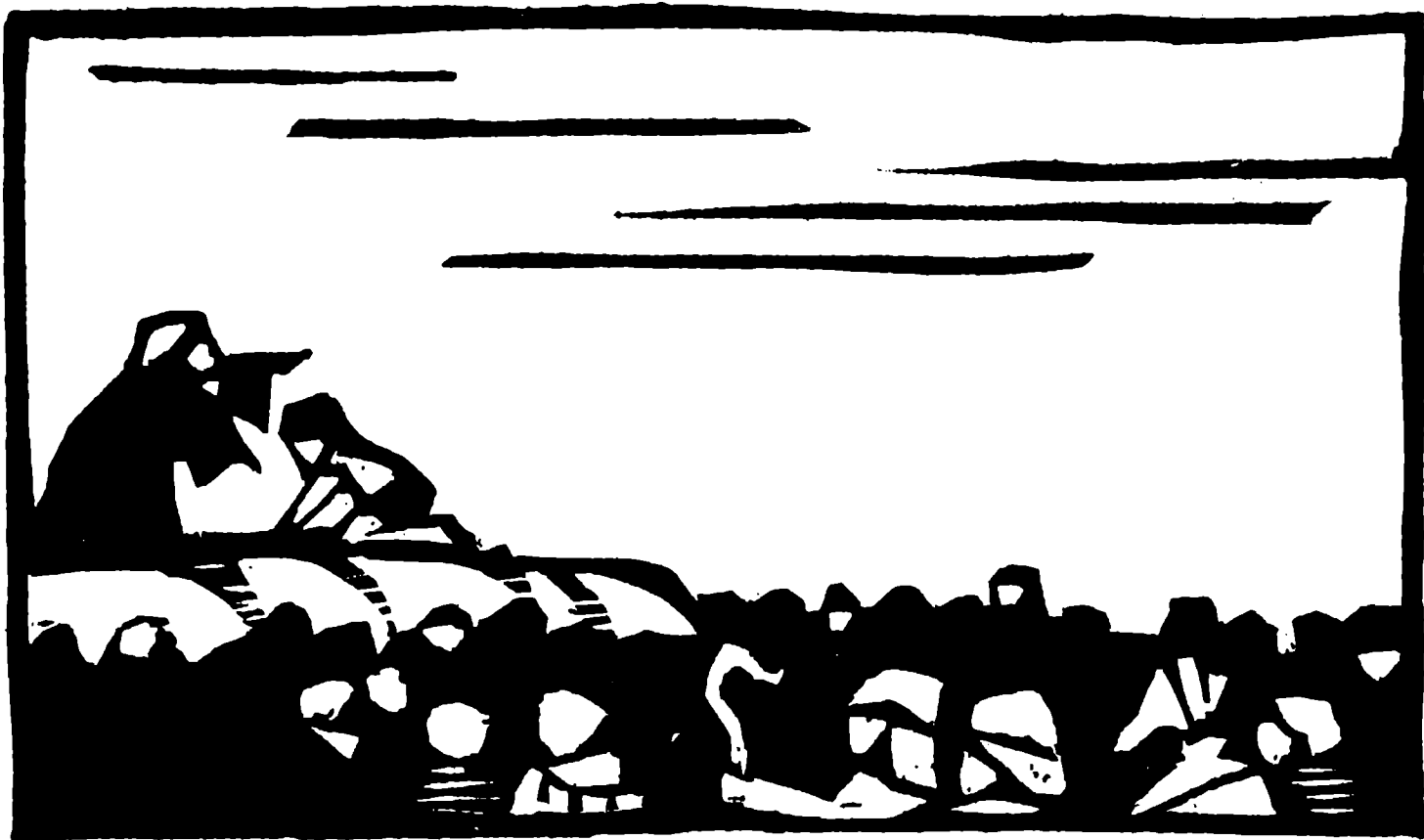
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🔗 [5] BALAAM'S ADVICE: Before Balaam returned to his home, the kings asked him how Israel could be destroyed.

Balaam answered, "Go to their synagogues. If you hear children's voices studying the Torah, you cannot destroy Israel. If the voices are silent, you may.

"For their patriarch Isaac said: 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau' " (Genesis 27:22). This means that so long as the sound of learning (the voice of Jacob) is heard, those who wish to destroy Israel (the hands of Esau) shall not succeed. Israel will perish when her children cease to study.

אַרְאֵנוּ וְלֹא עָתָה, אֲשׁוּרְנוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב; דֶּרֶךְ כּוֹכַב מִיַּעֲקֹב וְקֵם שִׁבְט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל.



## 24. NUMBERS [26-36]

### THE CENSUS AT THE END OF FORTY YEARS

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses and to Eleazar, the son of Aaron, saying, "Take a census of the whole congregation of Israel from twenty years old and upward, tribe by tribe, all who are able to go forth to war."

And the Children of Israel numbered six hundred and one thousand and seven hundred and thirty. But among them was not a man who was numbered by Moses and Aaron in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them,

"They shall surely die in the wilderness." So not one of them was left except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun.

And the Lord said to Moses, "The land shall be divided as an inheritance according to the number of names. To the greater you shall give the larger inheritance, and to the fewer you shall give the lesser inheritance. The land shall be divided by lot; according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. So shall no inheritance pass from one tribe to another; for the Children of Israel shall keep each the inheritance of his own tribe."

לְאֵלֶּהָ תִּחְלַק הָאָרֶץ בְּנִחְלָהּ בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת. לָרַב תִּרְבֶּה נִחְלָתוֹ וְלַמָּעֹט תִּמְעֹט נִחְלָתוֹ.

## DAUGHTERS, TOO, MAY INHERIT

THE DAUGHTERS OF Zelophehad, [1] of the families of Manasseh, drew near; and these are their names: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.

And they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, at the door of the Tent of Meeting, and said, "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among those who gathered against the Lord; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away with in his own family just because he had no sons? Give us a possession among our father's brethren."

Moses brought their cause before the Lord. And the Lord said, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak rightly: you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers. And you shall speak to the Children of

Israel, saying: 'If a man dies without a son, then his inheritance shall pass to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And it shall be a statute to the Children of Israel, as the Lord commanded Moses.' "

## A SUCCESSOR

AND THE LORD said to Moses, "Ascend this Mount Abarim [2] and behold the land which I have given to the Children of Israel. When you have seen it, you too shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was gathered."

And Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, [3] appoint a man over the congregation who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be as sheep without a shepherd."

🔗 [1] THE DAUGHTERS: From Israel's beginning, women were cherished and valued.

Protection of the daughter might come before the inheritance rights of the sons. If there was a son, married daughters received no share of an inheritance, but unmarried daughters received a portion. Provision for support of women was the first responsibility of the estate. If the property was small, the daughters received preference over the sons, who might get nothing.

🔗 [2] ASCEND MOUNT ABARIM: Why is Moses told in Numbers of his approaching death, although it does not occur until the end of Deu-

כֵּן בְּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד דּוֹבְרוֹת; נָתַן תָּמַן לָהֶם אֲחֻזַּת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶחָי אֲבִיהֶם.

And the Lord said, "Take unto you Joshua, the son of Nun, a man of spirit, [4] and lay your hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. And give him your authority, that all of the Children of Israel may obey. At his word

shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, all the congregation."

And Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands upon him; [5] and charged him, as the Lord had spoken.

teronomy? The Midrash says that Moses already knew, after he had struck the rock at Meribah, that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land.

When God gave instructions on the dividing of the land among the tribes, He told Moses when he would die, so as not to raise false hopes within him.

🔥 [3] GOD OF THE SPIRITS OF ALL FLESH: Why does Moses use this unusual form of address to God? The phrase appears here, and also in Numbers 16:22, in both cases with the same meaning—that of the multitudes of people on this earth, each is an individual with a soul of his own.

🔥 [4] WHY JOSHUA? After the daughters of Zelophehad left, Moses asked, "If even daughters may inherit, why cannot my son inherit the leadership, as the son of Aaron inherited the priesthood?"

And God replied, "He that watches the fig tree shall eat its fruit. Your sons will not inherit your leadership because they concerned themselves not with the Torah. Joshua, however, served you with devotion and prepared himself for leadership. He has earned the right of succession."

🔥 [5] LAID HIS HANDS UPON HIM: God told Moses to lay his hand upon Joshua's head, to signify that he is leader. So great was Moses' concern for the man who was to succeed him, that he placed both his hands on Joshua's head.

קח לך את יהושע בן-נון, איש אשר רוח בו, וסמכת את ידך עליו.



## THE TWO AND A HALF TRIBES

NOW THE TRIBE of Reuben and the tribe of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle. And when they saw that the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead were a suitable place for cattle, they came and spoke to Moses, saying, "This land which the Lord has conquered for the congregation of Israel is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle. If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession; do not take us across the Jordan."

And Moses said to the children of Gad and of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to war and you sit here?"

And they came near him and said, "We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones; but we ourselves will be armed and ready to go before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their homes. We will not return to our own homes until the Children of Israel have each inherited his inheritance."

And Moses said, "If you will do this thing, if you will arm and go before the Lord into battle, and every armed

man of you will cross the Jordan and fight until the land be subdued, then you will be clear before the Lord and before Israel, and this land shall be your possession. But if you will not do so, you will have sinned against the Lord, and be assured that your sin will find you out. So build your cities for your little ones and folds for your sheep, and keep your promise."

And Moses gave to the children of Gad and of Reuben, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan.

## CITIES OF REFUGE

AND THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall select cities to be cities of refuge [6] for you, so that a man who kills any person through error may flee there. These cities shall serve you as refuge from the avenger, that the slayer not die until he stand trial before the congregation.

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❧ [6] CITIES OF REFUGE: Why was Moses so interested in the cities of refuge? It is said that only he who has eaten a food knows its taste. Since Moses had unintentionally killed an Egyptian, he knew the feelings of a pursued man.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְבְנֵי גָד וּלְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן: הָאֲחֵיכֶם יָבוֹאוּ לְמִלְחָמָה וְאַתֶּם תָּשֻׁבוּ פֹה?

“There shall be six cities of refuge, three cities beyond the Jordan, and three cities in the land of Canaan. These six cities shall serve as a refuge for the Children of Israel, and for the stranger and for the settler among them, so that anyone who kills a person through error may flee there.

“But if he struck him with an iron object, or with a stone, or with a weapon of wood so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. If he thrust him in hatred, or hurled something at him intentionally, or in enmity struck him with his hand

so that he died, he is a murderer; he shall be put to death.

“But if he pushed him inadvertently, without enmity, or threw something at him unintentionally, or let a stone fall without seeing him, and he was not his enemy nor sought his harm, then the community shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood according to these regulations. And the community shall protect the manslayer from the avenger of blood; [7] and the community shall return him to his city of refuge to which he had fled, and he shall dwell in it.

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§ [7] AVENGER OF BLOOD: Avenging the death of a relative, even if his slaying was accidental, was required by custom, and even by law, in many supposedly civilized countries until very recently. In Arab lands to this day, a man who causes another's death, even by chance, is likely to be killed by the slain man's relatives. Every kinsman of the dead person is held responsible until the death is avenged.

Thousands of years ago our Scriptures legislated against senseless blood-letting, and forbade anyone to take the law into his own hands.

The statute on this was strict: the slayer had to flee to a special city of refuge, where the relatives could not touch him until after a trial. The court sent for the accused and tried him. If found guilty of willful murder, he was condemned; if not guilty, he was freed, and the avengers could not touch him without penalty of the law.

If the court decided that the slayer had killed unintentionally, he returned to the city of refuge, there to remain until the death of the High Priest. If he left it, the avengers could slay him without penalty.

Every city and town posted the locations of the refuge cities and the way to reach them.

וְהָצִילוּ הָעֵדָה אֶת הָרוֹצֵחַ מִיַּד גּוֹאֵל הַדָּם, וְהָשִׁיבוּ אוֹתוֹ הָעֵדָה אֶל עִיר מִקְלָטוֹ.

"But if the slayer ever goes beyond the bounds of his city of refuge to which he has fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside and kills him, there shall be no blood-guilt for him. The slayer must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest.

"The testimony of a single witness shall not suffice for a death sentence.

"You shall accept no ransom for the

life of a murderer who is guilty of murder; he shall surely be put to death. And you shall take no ransom in place of flight to the city of refuge. So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land. And you shall not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the Children of Israel."

וְעֵד אֶחָד לֹא יַעֲנֶה בְּנֶפֶשׁ לְמוֹת.



## 25. DEUTERONOMY [1-30]

### TAKE HEED LEST YOU FORGET

THESE ARE THE words which Moses spoke to all Israel [1] beyond the Jordan. And it came to pass in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses spoke to the Children of Israel all that the Lord had commanded him to say:

“And now, O Israel, heed the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, to do them, that you may live and enter and possess the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, gives you. For you who cleave to the Lord your God, are alive every one of you this day.”

“I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded

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[1] TO ALL ISRAEL: The phrase “all Israel” in this case has special meaning. Why were “all” specified? The Israelites had been called together to hear a long discourse of exhortation and reproof. All had to attend so that no one should say, “I was not there. I cannot be held responsible.”

וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בִּי אֲלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כָּלְכֶם הַיּוֹם.

me. Observe and do them; [2] for this is your wisdom in the sight of the peoples, who when they hear all these statutes shall say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has God so near to them as the Lord our God is whenever we call upon Him? And what

great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances as righteous as all this Torah [3] which I give to you this day?

“Only take heed and watch most carefully that you do not forget the things which your eyes saw, [4] but make them known to your children and your children’s children.”

🔗 [2] OBSERVE AND DO THEM: Of all his subjects, only the Jews refused to worship Emperor Hadrian as a god. Therefore, he forbade the teaching of Judaism on pain of death. Nonetheless, Rabbi Akiba continued to teach the Torah. When his friend, Pappas, warned him of his peril, Akiba answered with a story.

It seems that a fox passed a stream and saw that the fish were greatly agitated. “We are trying to evade the fishermen’s nets,” they explained.

Said the wily fox, “Why not come up on dry land with me, and escape the fishermen?”

“If we are not safe in the water, which is our natural habitat,” the fish replied, “how can we live on land?”

Akiba concluded with, “If we are not safe when we study the Torah, how can Judaism survive if we stop?”

🔗 [3] THIS TORAH: The Hebrew word “Torah” means “teaching” or “instruction.” It is sometimes translated as “Law,” a mistranslation which is unjust to the original. Torah comes from the root of the verb, “to aim at a target and hit it,” just as the word *het* (sin), comes from the root, “to aim at a target and miss it.”

It was probably Philo, the Jewish sage of Alexandria of two thousand years ago, who used the term “Law” as translation for Torah. He meant to point out the logic of the Jewish religion as contrasted with Greek worship, in which there was neither order nor meaning.

וְשָׁמְרֵתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם, כִּי הִיא חֻמַּתְכֶּם וּבִינְתְּכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים.

## THE SH'MA—HEAR, O ISRAEL

“HEAR, O ISRAEL [5]— Sh'ma Yisrael—  
the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!

“And you shall love [6] the Lord your  
God with all your heart and with all  
your soul [7] and with all your might.  
And these words which I command you

✎ [4] YOUR EYES SAW: Never before in human history had God revealed Himself to an entire people. Every other revelation had been made to an individual or to a few. At Sinai God revealed Himself to all Israel, to make of them “a kingdom of priests and a holy people.”

✎ [5] HEAR, O ISRAEL: The *Sh'ma*, the essence of our faith, is recited at every morning and evening prayer, as well as before retiring at night.

It is so important that the Scribes set it apart from the rest of the text with a large *ayin* in *Sh'ma* and a large *dalet* in *Ehad*. The *dalet* is clearly distinguished so as not to be mistaken for a *rêsh*, which would produce “the Lord is *another*,” the very opposite of what is intended. If the *ayin* in *Sh'ma* were misread as *aleph*, the word would mean “perhaps.” There is no “perhaps” in Israel’s conviction that “the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.”

✎ [6] AND YOU SHALL LOVE: The sage, the *Hafetz Hayyim*, observed that when a child sits on his father’s lap he first learns to know him, then to love him, and at length to obey him. Similarly, we are told first to acknowledge God, next to love Him, and finally to observe His commandments.

✎ [7] WITH ALL YOUR SOUL: The Romans seized Akiba and condemned him to death by torture. As his weeping pupils watched, the old man’s body was raked with iron combs. When the hour for the evening prayer came, Akiba said, “All my life I loved God with all my heart and all my might. Now, as I give up my soul to Him, I know that I love Him with all my soul as well.”

Then Rabbi Akiba recited the *Sh'ma*, and died.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד.

this day [8] shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them [9] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them [10] as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as symbols be-

tween your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts [11] of your house and upon your gates."

#### WHEN YOUR SON ASKS YOU

"WHEN YOUR SON asks [12] you in time to come: 'What is the meaning of the

❧ [8] THIS DAY: The Hebrew word for "this day," can also mean "to-day." The Rabbis saw that both meanings applied to its use in the *Sh'ma*. Its teachings are never old or out of fashion, they pointed out, but are freshly commanded to us each day, and remain as vital and as significant as at first.

❧ [9] TEACH THEM: The Hebrew word, *shinantam*, means "you shall cut them in," almost as though we were to chisel the teachings onto our children. It tells us that these ideas are not remote and unrealistic classroom lessons, but the very fabric of life and living.

In Judaism, the teaching of the word of God is considered the greatest *mitzvah* (commandment or "good deed"). The Jew does not worship because he fears God, but because he reveres the holiness, the goodness and the beauty of Judaism. "Know before whom you stand!" says the Talmud.

❧ [10] BIND THEM: Traditional Jews take these words as an injunction to wear *T'fillin* (phylacteries).

❧ [11] ON YOUR DOORPOSTS: This refers to the *M'zuzah*, a small parchment scroll (bearing the *Sh'ma* plus 11:13-21 of Deuteronomy), enclosed in a protective case. The *M'zuzah* is placed on the right doorpost of the Jewish home.

The word *Shaddai*, the Almighty, which is written on the reverse of the parchment, is visible through a tiny window in the case. The

וְשָׁנַתָּם לְבִנְיָהּ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם, בְּשִׁבְתָּךְ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבִלְכָתְךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.

laws, the statutes, and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son: 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; [13] and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and terrible, upon Egypt, and upon Pharaoh. And He brought us out from there that He might bring us into the land which He promised to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to observe all these laws, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might keep us alive, as it is this day.

And we shall be righteous to the Lord our God if we observe all His commandments.' "

#### WHY ISRAEL?

"WHEN THE LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, He shall cast out many nations before you. Then you shall make no covenant with them; neither shall you marry with them: [14] you shall not give your daughter to his son, nor take his daugh-

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*M'zuzah* is a symbol of God's watchful care. It serves to remind us, when we enter or leave, that our home is dedicated to the spirit of Judaism.

🔔 [12] WHEN YOUR SON ASKS: The *Pesah Seder* is a fulfillment of the command to answer one's son properly. To make certain that the boy asks the question, the *Mah Nishtanah*, or Four Questions, is recited at the *Seder*.

The *Seder* is enlivened by songs. The search for the *Aphikoman* also serves to keep the children interested, so that the Biblical command may be fulfilled.

🔔 [13] SLAVES IN EGYPT: Spiritually we are all descendants of Pharaoh's slaves, even those of us who were converted to Judaism after the Exodus. Converts are considered children of Abraham, whose descendants were enslaved in Egypt. "Every Jew should regard himself as though he himself came forth from Egypt," the *Haggadah* tells us.

🔔 [14] YOU SHALL NOT MARRY THEM: To a small nation surrounded by different peoples, intermarriage was a grave threat. When an Israelite

וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם לְמַעַן הָבִיא אוֹתָנוּ לְתֶת לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע  
לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ.



ter for your son. For they will turn away your children from following Me to serve other gods.

“But you shall break down their altars, and dash into pieces their gods. For you are a holy people to the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be His own treasure, [15] from all peoples upon the earth. The Lord did not set His love upon you nor choose you because you were more numerous than any people, for you were the smallest of any people; [16] but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers.

“Know, therefore, that the Lord your

God, He is God; the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy to a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”

#### AND YOU SHALL REMEMBER

“YOU SHALL OBSERVE all the commandments that I command you today, so that you may live and multiply, and enter and possess the land which the Lord promised to your fathers. And you shall remember the way the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness. And He afflicted you and allowed you to hunger, then fed you

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married a heathen, he often was lost to Judaism, for he might be turned away from the worship of the One God. A marriage between a Jew and a convert to Judaism is not considered an intermarriage, however; it is a marriage of two Jews.

☞ [15] HIS OWN TREASURE: The fact that Israel was chosen by God does not imply that other peoples are inferior. Every nation has its role to play in human history. The role of Judaism is to bring mankind closer to God and, therefore, to righteous ways. God's closeness is always linked with holiness; only as we are holy are we close to God. As the *Kiddush* says: “For You have chosen us and sanctified us from all the nations.”

☞ [16] SMALLEST OF ANY PEOPLE: The role of the Jewish people does not depend on its numbers. This is reflected in the words of the prophet Zechariah, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (4:6).

לֹא מֵרַבָּכֶם מְכַל הָעַמִּים חֶשֶׁק יְיָ בָּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בָּכֶם, כִּי אֹתָם הִמָּעֵט מְכַל הָעַמִּים.

with manna which was strange to you, so that you might know that man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that is uttered by the Lord.

"Your clothes did not wear out, nor did your feet swell, these forty years. So you shall understand in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

"And you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to fear Him. For the Lord your God brings you to a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and underground springs, bursting forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you shall eat bread without scarcity—you shall not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you may dig copper. And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God [17] for the good land which He has given you."

#### IT IS NOT YOUR POWER

"BEWARE LEST YOU forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments; lest when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built fine houses and dwell in them, and your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold have increased, that your heart does not become haughty and you forget the Lord your God. And lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His Covenant which He swore to your fathers."

#### HE IS YOUR GLORY

"AND NOW, ISRAEL, what does the Lord your God require of you, [18] but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him; and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart

✍ [17] AND BLESS THE LORD: The Talmud says: "Whoever enjoys a thing without blessing the Giver, commits a theft against God."

The Rabbis held that every meal must be followed by blessings of gratitude. "A loaf of bread on the table is a greater miracle than the parting of the Sea," they said.

✍ [18] REQUIRE OF YOU: God asks nothing that is beyond man's abilities: only love, reverence, service and the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*,

אֶרֶץ חָטָה וְשִׁעוּרָה וְגִפֶּן וּתְאֵנָה וְרִמּוֹן, אֶרֶץ זֵית שָׁמֶן וְדִבְשׁ.

and with all your soul; to keep for your good the commandments of the Lord and His statutes, which I command you this day.

“For to the Lord your God belongs the heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all there is on it. Only the Lord delighted in your fathers to love them, and He chose their children after them, even you, above all peoples. The Lord your God, He is God of gods and Lord of lords, the mighty and the awe-inspiring, who does not show partiality nor seek reward. [19] He upholds justice for the orphan and widow, [20] and

loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore, you shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God. He is your glory and He is your God, who has done these tremendous things for you. Your fathers went down into Egypt with seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of heaven for multitude.”

#### BEWARE OF STRANGE GODS

“WHEN THE LORD your God cuts off the nations before you, and you take their

His commandments. So long as we remember that it is God who created the beauties and wonders of life, not only may we partake of them, we are commanded to do so.

As illustration, a Nazarite was required to atone for a sin. What was his sin? That he had denied himself full enjoyment of God's world.

☞ [19] NOR SEEK REWARD: Worship, sacrifice, or even charity—all are of no value if they are attempts to reward or to “bribe” God. There are those who would change God's will without changing their own hearts. One must right the wrong he has done before he can come to God in prayer.

☞ [20] JUSTICE FOR THE ORPHAN AND WIDOW: It might seem, at first glance, that justice for all people should be indicated. The orphan and the widow, however, are given extra protection because they are helpless.

וְאַהֲבַתָּם אֶת הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

place and dwell in their land, take care that you are not lured into following their ways. Do not inquire about their gods, and ask: 'How did these nations serve their gods? for I would like to do likewise.' You shall not do so to the Lord your God; for they have done every abomination which the Lord hates; for even their own sons and daughters do they burn in fire to their gods.

"You shall observe all this which I command you; you shall not add to it nor diminish it.

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises in your midst and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, and he says: 'Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or of that dreamer. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. After the Lord your God you shall walk, and Him you shall fear, and His commandments you shall keep, and you shall listen to His voice, and serve Him and cleave to Him."

#### CHOOSE LIFE

"YOU ARE STANDING this day, all of you, before the Lord your God: your leaders, your tribes, your elders, and your officers,

even all the men of Israel; your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water. You are entering into a Covenant, sealed by an oath, which the Lord your God makes with you this day, that He may make you this day His own people and that He may be your God, as He has spoken to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Not with you alone do I make this Covenant and this oath, but with him that stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him who is not here with us this day.

"For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who shall go up to heaven, and bring it to us, and make us understand it, so that we may do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who will go across the sea for us and bring it to us, and make us understand it, so that we may do it?' But the word is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil, for I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, so that you

כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מֵאֵד, בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

shall live, and the Lord your God shall bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away and you will not heed, but shall worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day that you shall surely perish.

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and

the curse! Therefore, choose life that you may live, you and your children; that you may love the Lord your God, and heed His voice, and cleave to Him; for that is your life and the length of your days; that you may dwell in the land which the Lord promised to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נִתְּנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה. וּבַחֲרָתָ בַּחַיִּים, לְמַעַן תַּחְיֶה  
אֶתָּה וְיִרְעֶיךָ.



## 26. DEUTERONOMY [16-31]

### MOSES WRITES THE TORAH

AND MOSES WROTE the Torah and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying:

### JUSTICE

“JUDGES AND OFFICERS shall you appoint in all your gates, which the Lord your God will give you, tribe by tribe, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. [1]

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[1] **RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT:** Why was God so concerned about justice? Because God's own honor was at stake. A judge's decision could destroy a person's livelihood, if not his life; could strip him of pride and honor. Because his responsibility was so great, a judge must be both wise and impartial. Since he sat as religious arbitrator, the honor of Judaism, and even of God, was involved.

שׁוֹפְטִים וְשׁוֹטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָהֶם בְּכָל שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָהֶם לְשִׁבְטֶיךָ,  
וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת הָעָם מִשְׁפַּט צֶדֶק.

“You shall not pervert justice. [2]

“You shall not show favoritism; neither shall you take a gift, for a gift blinds the eyes of the wise, and perverts the words of the righteous.

“Justice, justice, [3] shall you pursue, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you.

“You shall not pervert the justice due to a stranger or to an orphan; nor take a widow’s garment in pledge. And you shall remember that you were once a slave in Egypt, and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there, therefore I command you to do this thing.

“The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; only for his own sin [4] shall anyone be put to death. [5]

“And if a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, you shall then hang him on a tree. But his body shall not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him the same day; for he who is hanged is a reproach to God.

“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or a stranger resid-

❧ [2] **PERVERT JUSTICE:** The Rabbis maintained that bribery or favoritism was only one type of misuse of justice. Any extra favor to one party (such as addressing him in a kinder tone, or allowing him to sit while the other stands), is forbidden. Acceptance of the slightest favor by a judge is also barred, even though he may assure himself that it will not affect his decision. He might be inclined against the donor, and again justice would not be served.

❧ [3] **JUSTICE, JUSTICE:** Certain Rabbis held that “justice” is repeated to indicate that an accused person who has been found innocent cannot be tried a second time for the same crime. This is comparable to present-day law forbidding double jeopardy.

A person who has been judged guilty can be retried if his innocence may thus be established.

Other Rabbis pointed out that justice is linked with living in the land of Israel. If there is no justice, the land cannot exist. *Sifri*, an ancient legal book, declares: “The appointment of honest judges is sufficient merit to keep Israel alive and secure on their land.”

לֹא יוֹמְתוּ אָבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים וּבְנֵים לֹא יוֹמְתוּ עַל אָבוֹת. אִישׁ בְּחֻטְאוֹ יוֹמְתוֹ.

ing in your land. In the same day you shall give him his pay, before the sun goes down, because he is poor and awaits it urgently."

#### LOANS AND PLEDGES

"YOU SHALL NOT take interest [6] for

what you lend to your brother: interest of money, of food, or of anything else that is lent upon interest.

"When you do lend your neighbor any kind of loan, you shall not go into his house to take his pledge. You shall wait outside, and the man to whom you are making the loan shall bring the

🔗 [4] ONLY FOR HIS OWN SIN: This ordinance seems to contradict the statement in Exodus that the descendants of an evildoer will suffer to the fourth generation.

The line in Exodus teaches a different moral lesson: that the influence of a bad home life is likely to persist for several generations.

The teaching here, that man is punished judicially only for his own sins, is to make certain that no one is punished for the sins of his parents or of other members of his race, nationality or religion. In its era, this idea was a break with tradition. Until very recently, if a man committed certain crimes, his whole family was punished; their property was confiscated, and they all might be driven into exile, or even put to death.

🔗 [5] PUT TO DEATH: In the time of the Second Temple, the Rabbis had almost completely dispensed with capital punishment. They so interpreted the Biblical laws that an execution was rare. A Sanhedrin, Jewish court, that condemned one man to death in seventy years is called a "murderous" Sanhedrin by the Talmud. Rabbis Tarphon and Akiba commented, "If we had been members of that Sanhedrin, no man would have been condemned to death."

Only God can give life; only He should be able to take it. A candle which cannot be rekindled should not be extinguished.

🔗 [6] YOU SHALL NOT TAKE INTEREST: Lending to a needy fellow-Jew became an important matter for the Jewish community. Charity, no

אלו היינו בסנהדרין – לא נהרג אדם מעולם.



pledge outside to you. And if he is a poor man and you take his garment in pledge, you shall return it to him by sunset that he may sleep in his garment and bless you.

“No man shall take a handmill or an upper millstone [7] in pledge, for he is taking a man’s life in pledge.”

#### SLAVES

“IF YOUR BROTHER, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, be sold to you, he shall serve you six years; and in the seventh year you shall let him go free. And when you let him go free, you shall not let him go empty-handed; you shall provide for him liberally [8] from your flock and

from your threshing-floor, and from your winepress, and from all with which God has blessed you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you, therefore I command you to do this thing.

“And you must not begrudge it when you let him free; for he has served you six years at half the wage of a hired worker; and the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do.

“You shall not deliver to his master a slave who has escaped to you. He shall live with you, within your community, wherever he chooses to dwell; you shall not wrong him.

“If a man is caught kidnapping any

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matter how kindly, damages the pride of him who receives it; but a loan without interest helps him re-establish himself. As a result, Hebrew Free Loan Societies, which exist to this day, have helped many get back on their feet without loss of self-respect.

A proverb says, “If you give a man a fish, you have fed him for one day; if you teach him to fish you have fed him all his days.”

🔗 [7]. A HANDMILL OR MILLSTONE: A handmill or millstone could not be taken by a debtor as a pledge, lest his whole family go hungry. The Rabbis also forbade the taking in pledge of a man’s tools, for without them the borrower could not earn a living.

🔗 [8] PROVIDE FOR HIM LIBERALLY: When a Hebrew slave went free, his master had to provide for him liberally, so that he might have a fresh start in life. If the freed man left empty-handed, he would be

כִּי יִמְכַּר לְךָ אֶחֱיוֹ הָעִבְרִי אוֹ הָעִבְרִיָּה וַעֲבַדְךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים, וּבִשְׁנֵה הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּשְׁלַחְנוּ חֲפָשִׁי מֵעִמְךָ.

of his fellow Israelites, [9] and he treats him as a slave, or sells him, the thief shall die; so shall you put away the evil from your midst.”

GOING TO BATTLE

“WHEN YOU GO forth to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and forces greater than yours, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, is with you.

“And before the battle, the officers shall speak to the people, saying: If there is a man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it, let him return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.

“If there is a man who has planted a vineyard and has not used its ripened fruit, let him return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit.

“And if there is a man who has betrothed a wife but has not married her, let him return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.

“And the officers shall speak further to the people: If there is a man who is fearful and faint-hearted, let him return to his house, lest his brethren’s hearts melt as does his.

“And when the officers have finished speaking to the people, the army captains shall be placed at the head of the people.”

unable to earn a livelihood, and might soon be forced to sell himself into bondage again. For this reason, the Rabbis required that he be given animals that bear young (a mule would not do), so that he might have a chance to prosper in his new freedom.

Contrast this with the too-long delayed freedom for slaves in Western countries. In many, the masters were compensated for loss of their slaves, but the slave received neither payment for his years of labor nor a sum to help him get started.

🔪 [9] THE KIDNAPPER: Why was there a death penalty for kidnapping?

A man’s freedom is so precious in Judaism that he who steals a human being to sell him as a slave is condemned.

When the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi decreed death for stealing a slave, it was out of concern for the property rights of the owner, even when the property was a human being.

מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בַּיִת חֲדָשׁ וְלֹא חֲנֻכוֹ, יֵלֶךְ וְיָשׁוּב לְבֵיתוֹ, כִּן יָמוּת בַּמָּלְחָמָה  
וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר יַחְנֹכֶנּוּ.

## ATTACKING A CITY

“WHEN YOU DRAW near a city to fight against it, [10] you shall offer it peace.

If it accepts peace and opens its gates to you, then all the people in it shall pay tribute to you and shall serve you. If it will not make peace with you, but will make war against you, then you shall besiege it.

“When you besiege a city, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; you may eat their fruit, but you shall not cut them down; for the tree of the field [11] is not men, to be besieged by you. Only those trees which you know are not fruit-bearing

may you destroy and cut down, in order to build a siege-work against the city that makes war against you, until it falls.”

## THE KING

“WHEN YOU COME into the land which the Lord your God has given you, and shall say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall set over you only a king whom the Lord your God shall choose: only one from your brethren shall you make king over you; you may not put over you a foreigner who is not your kinsman.

“He shall not acquire for himself many horses, [12] nor cause the people

🔗 [10] TO FIGHT AGAINST A CITY: The Israelites might fight against a city, our Rabbis said, but not starve it out, or cut off its water supply, or afflict it with pestilence.

A city may be conquered, but not destroyed, said the *Sifri*.

🔗 [11] TREE OF THE FIELD: The Rabbis further declared that wanton destruction was hateful. Anything of value was created for use, and its destruction was considered a sin. The destruction of food in a world that still hungers is criminal.

🔗 [12] TOO MANY HORSES: The reference to “many horses” could have only one meaning: the build-up of cavalry for war. Egypt was noted for its horses. The Rabbis said that the king may acquire horses and chariots for his private use only. If he acquires many chariots he puts his faith in weapons of destruction instead of in God, and this will lead to war.

כִּי תִקְרַב אֶל עִיר לְהִלָּחֶם עָלֶיהָ, וְקִרְאתָ אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם.

to return to Egypt so that he may get horses, because the Lord has said to you: You shall return no more that way. Neither shall he take many wives, [13] that his heart be not turned away; neither shall he acquire too much silver or too much gold.

“And it shall be, when he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall have a copy of this Torah written for him in a book which is before the priests, the Levites. And he shall keep it with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to keep all the words of this Torah and these statutes, to do them. He shall not become proud, nor turn aside from the commandment to the right or to the left; so that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children, in the midst of Israel.”

#### FIELDS AND VINEYARDS

“WHEN YOU COME into your neighbor’s vineyard, [14] you may eat your fill; but you shall not put any in your vessel.

“When you come into your neighbor’s standing corn, you may pluck ears with your hand; but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing corn.

“When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

“When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the branches a second time; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

“When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, for

☞ [13] TOO MANY WIVES: Solomon, who was famous for his thousand wives, is an example of what happened when a king disobeyed the law against multiplying wives. He taxed his citizens ruinously so that he might support his wives in luxury, while his people became impoverished and embittered. On his death his kingdom fell apart.

☞ [14] YOUR NEIGHBOR’S VINEYARD: The Rabbis limited this rule. They said that if every passerby took just one cluster of grapes or one piece of fruit, the farmer would be left with empty boughs. They limited this right to the hired men who worked the farm.

The Talmud warns, however, “Do not be a glutton, or you will not be hired again.”

וְהִיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל יָמֵי חַיָּיו, לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהָיו לְשֹׁמֵר  
אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת.

the fatherless, and for the widow. For you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, therefore I command you to do this.

“You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain. [15]

“At the end of every three years, you shall take a full tenth of your produce and shall lay it within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance in your land, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow shall come and eat their fill.”

#### PILGRIMAGES

“THREE TIMES A year shall all your males appear before the Lord your God, in the place which He shall choose; on the

Festival of Unleavened Bread, and on the Festival of Weeks, and on the Festival of Booths. And they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.”

#### THE OFFERING OF THE FIRST-FRUIT

“AND WHEN YOU come into the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, you shall take the first of all the soil's produce that you harvest from the land; and you shall put it in a basket and shall go to the place in which the Lord your God chooses that His name dwell. And you shall come to

☞ [15] THE OX: “A righteous man regards the life of his beast,” says the Book of Proverbs (12:10). He cares for the animal's needs and respects its feelings. He must feed his animals before he feeds himself. Consideration for animals is part of Jewish belief, in marked contrast to almost all other early civilizations.

The Romans pitted maddened animals against one another in the arenas. This is not surprising, since they did the same with human beings. When gladiators fought and killed each other, the Romans considered it a holiday.

“Blood sport” is the name given to hunting for sport, in which hundreds of birds or small animals might be slaughtered for amusement. The Bible despises Esau for the very reason that he was a hunter.

שֶׁלשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל זְכוּרָךְ אֶת פָּנֵי יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחָר:  
בְּחַג הַמִּצּוֹת וּבְחַג הַשְּׂבֻעוֹת וּבְחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת.

the priest who will be at that time, and say: I give thanks to the Lord your God that I came to the land which the Lord promised to our fathers to give us.

“And the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and place it before the altar of the Lord your God. And you shall declare before the Lord your God: ‘A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a great nation, mighty and numerous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and oppressed us, and laid upon us hard bondage. And we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression. And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terror, and with signs and with wonders. And He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I

have brought the first-fruit of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me.’

“And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God. And you shall rejoice in all the good fortune which the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, and the Levite and the stranger in your midst.”

#### FOR ALL TO SEE

THEN MOSES AND the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, “Keep all the commandments which I command you this day.

“And on the day when you pass over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall raise up great stones and plaster them over. And you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah, so that you may go into the land which the Lord your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

אֲרָמִי אוֹבֵד אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרָיִם, וַיֵּגֶר שָׁם בְּמִתֵּי מִצְרַיִם, וַיְהִי שָׁם לִגְוִי גָדוֹל עָצוּם וְרָב.



## 27. DEUTERONOMY [27-32]

### THE GREAT DOOMS

THEN MOSES AND the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, "Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you are become a people [1] to the Lord your God. You shall therefore hearken to the

voice of the Lord your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes, which I command you this day."

And Moses charged the people that day, saying, "These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have passed over the Jordan:

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[1] YOU ARE BECOME A PEOPLE: It was fully forty years after the Exodus that Moses said to Israel, "This day you are become a people to the Lord." Had this not happened at the Exodus or at Sinai?

The Rabbis recognized that a new generation had arisen in the wilderness. Their fathers had experienced the Exodus and the revelation at Sinai, not this generation. Each generation must confirm for itself its relationship to God.

Therefore, Israel was asked to reaffirm the Covenant. They would

הִסָּכַת וּשְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיִיתָ לְעַם לַיהוָה.

Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin; and these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the dooms: Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

“And the Levites shall speak and say to all the men of Israel with a loud voice:

“Cursed be he [2] who makes a graven or molten image, an abomination to the Lord, and sets it up in secret. And all the people shall answer: Amen.

“Cursed be he who dishonors his father or his mother. And all the people shall say: Amen.

“Cursed be he who removes his neighbor’s landmark. And all the people shall say: Amen.

“Cursed be he who makes the blind go astray. And all the people shall say: Amen.

“Cursed be he who perverts the justice due to the stranger, fatherless, and

widow. And all the people shall say: Amen.

“Cursed be he who strikes his neighbor in secret. And all the people shall say: Amen.

“Cursed be he who does not uphold the words of this Torah to do them. And all the people shall say: Amen.”

THE GREAT BLESSINGS

“AND IT SHALL come to pass, if you hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe all His commandments, that the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, [3] if you will listen to the voice of the Lord your God.

“Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.

do so again after they had crossed the Jordan and taken possession of the Promised Land.

🔗 [2] CURSED BE HE: These commandments are concerned with sins which might be committed privately, without anyone else’s knowledge. What one does in the privacy of his home is as important as that which is visible to all.

The Rabbis illustrate this with the story of a man who began to bore a hole under his seat in a boat. When the other passengers complained, he retorted, “It’s none of your business! The hole is under my seat!” They answered, “Yes, but the water will enter and drown us all.”

כָּרוֹךְ אֶתָּה בְּעִיר וּבְכָרוֹךְ אֶתָּה בַּשָּׂדֶה.



"Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your land, and the fruit of your cattle.

"Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading trough.

"Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

"The Lord will ordain blessing to you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

"The Lord will establish you as a holy people unto Himself, as He has sworn to you, if you keep His commandments and walk in His ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is upon you.

"The Lord will open to you His goodly treasure, the heaven, to give the rain of your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, if you hearken to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day to do."

BE STRONG AND OF GOOD COURAGE!

THEN MOSES WENT and spoke these words to all Israel: "I am one hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no longer come and go; and the Lord has said to me, 'You shall not go over the Jordan.' The Lord your God, He will go over before you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall take their place. And Joshua shall be at your head, as the Lord has spoken. Be strong and of good courage! Do not be afraid nor fear them; for the Lord your God goes with you! He will not fail you nor forsake you."

And Moses called Joshua and said to him before all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage; for you shall go with this people into the land which the Lord has promised to their fathers to give them; and you will enable them to inherit it."

And the Lord said to Moses, "The time is near when you must die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may instruct him."

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🔥 [3] THE BLESSINGS SHALL OVERTAKE YOU: These blessings, like the curses, seem almost like living things which will pursue one who does good or one who performs evil. He will earn more than the blessing or the curse: it is as though his deeds will give birth to more deeds, to make his life wonderful or hideous, as he has chosen.

חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ, כִּי אַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְיָ לְאֲבוֹתָם לָתֵת לָהֶם, וְאַתָּה תְּנַחֵלָנָה אוֹתָם.



So Moses and Joshua went to the Tent of Meeting. And the Lord appeared in a pillar of cloud in the Tent. And the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, you are soon to sleep with your fathers; and this people will rise up and go astray after the foreign gods of the land to which they go, and will forsake Me and break My Covenant which I have made with them. Now, therefore, write this song for you, [4] and teach it to the Children of Israel; then, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness.”

MOSES’ SONG OF GOD

SO MOSES WROTE this song the same day;

and he commanded the Levites, “Assemble all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to witness against them.”  
And Moses spoke in the ears of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song:

“Give ear, you heavens, [5] and I  
will speak;  
And let the earth hear the words of  
my mouth.  
May my teaching drop as the rain,  
My speech fall as the dew;  
As a gentle rain upon the tender  
grass,  
And as the showers upon the herb.

-  [4] WRITE THIS SONG FOR YOU: Since the command to write the song is put in the plural, the Rabbis understood that both Moses and Joshua were to write it.  
Abraham ibn Ezra, the great Spanish-Jewish Biblical commentator, held that the plural form instructs each Israelite that he must write for himself a copy of the Torah. Since few men are capable of this, the custom arose that during the celebration which is held when a scribe is finishing a scroll, each man present is given the honor of filling in one of the final letters in order that he may fulfill his obligation.
-  [5] GIVE EAR, YOU HEAVENS: Moses calls on the heavens and earth to witness that God has made a Covenant with the Israelites, for no treaty is legal without witnesses. The only eternal witnesses—for this Covenant is everlasting—are heaven and earth.

הָאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶדְבָּרָה, וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי פִי.

For I will proclaim the name of the  
Lord;  
Give greatness to our God.

“The Rock, His work is perfect;  
For all His ways are justice;  
A faithful God, [6] without  
iniquity;  
He is just and upright.

“Remember the days of old,  
Consider the years of many  
generations;  
Ask your father, and he will in-  
form you,  
Your elders, and they will tell you.  
When the Most High gave the  
nations their inheritance,

When He separated the children  
of men,  
He fixed the borders of the peoples  
According to the number of the  
Children of Israel.  
For the portion of the Lord is His  
people,  
Jacob the share of His inheritance.

“He found him in a desert land,  
In the waste of the howling  
wilderness;  
He surrounded him, He cared for  
him,  
He kept him as the apple of His  
eye.  
As an eagle that stirs up her nest,  
Hovers over her young,

🔗 [6] A FAITHFUL GOD: Why should God be faithful to man? God is faithful not for His own gain, but so that man will follow His goodness.

Dama ben Netaniah had a precious stone which he hid for safe-keeping under his bed. A merchant offered him a large sum for the gem, but when he went to get the stone, he found his father asleep on the bed. He reported that he could not sell the gem at that time. The merchant thought that he was bargaining, and offered him a higher price. Dama still refused.

After a while his father awoke, whereupon Dama gave the gem to the merchant. The buyer expected to pay the larger sum, but Dama refused it.

“Your first price was sufficient,” he said. “My father was sleeping and the gem was under his bed. I do not wish to be rewarded for obeying God’s command. As God is faithful to man, so do I wish to be faithful to God, for His sake, and not for reward.”

כַּנְשֵׁר יַעִיר קִנּוּ, עַל גּוֹזְלֵיוֹ יִרְחֶף...

Spreads out her wings, takes them,  
Carries them on her wings—  
 The Lord alone did lead him,  
 And there was no strange god with  
 Him.

“He made him ride on the high  
 places of the earth,  
 And he ate the fruit of the field;  
 And he sucked honey out of the  
 crag, [7]  
 And oil out of the flinty rock;  
 Curd of cows, and milk of sheep,  
 With fat of lambs,  
 And rams of the herds of Bashan,  
 and he-goats;  
 And from the blood of grape you  
 drank foaming wine.

“But Yeshurun grew fat, [8] and  
 kicked—  
 You grew fat, you grew thick, gross  
 with food—

And he forsook God who made  
 him,  
 And scoffed at the Rock of his  
 salvation.

“And He said: I will hide My face  
 from them,  
 I shall see what their end shall be;  
 For they are a very perverse  
 generation,  
 Children in whom there is no  
 faithfulness.  
 They angered Me with a no-god;  
 I will anger them with a no-people.

“And the teeth of beasts will I send  
 upon them,  
 With the poison of crawling things  
 of the dust.  
 The sword shall bring death out-  
 side, as shall the terror within;  
 Slaying both young man and  
 maiden,

☞ [7] HONEY OUT OF THE CRAG: Bees often make their hives in the clefts of rock or in hollow trees, from which the honey oozes. A wandering shepherd is able to suck honey from a crag or from the side of a tree.

Oil does come from flinty rock. The farmers deliberately plant their olive trees among limestone rocks. Fed by the minerals, the trees flourish and grow heavy with fruit.

☞ [8] YESHURUN GREW FAT: “*Yeshurun*,” a poetic name for the people of Israel, comes from the word *yashar*, upright. Even the upright man, however, may become complacent if he is too prosperous.

...יִפְרֹשׁ כִּנְפָיו יִקְחֶהוּ, יִשְׁאַהוּ עַל אֲבָרְתּוֹ.

The infant as well as the man of  
gray hairs.  
Vengeance is Mine, [9] and  
recompense,  
For the time when their foot shall  
slip.  
But the Lord will vindicate His  
people  
And He will take compassion on  
His servants.

"See now that I, I am He,  
And there is no god besides Me;

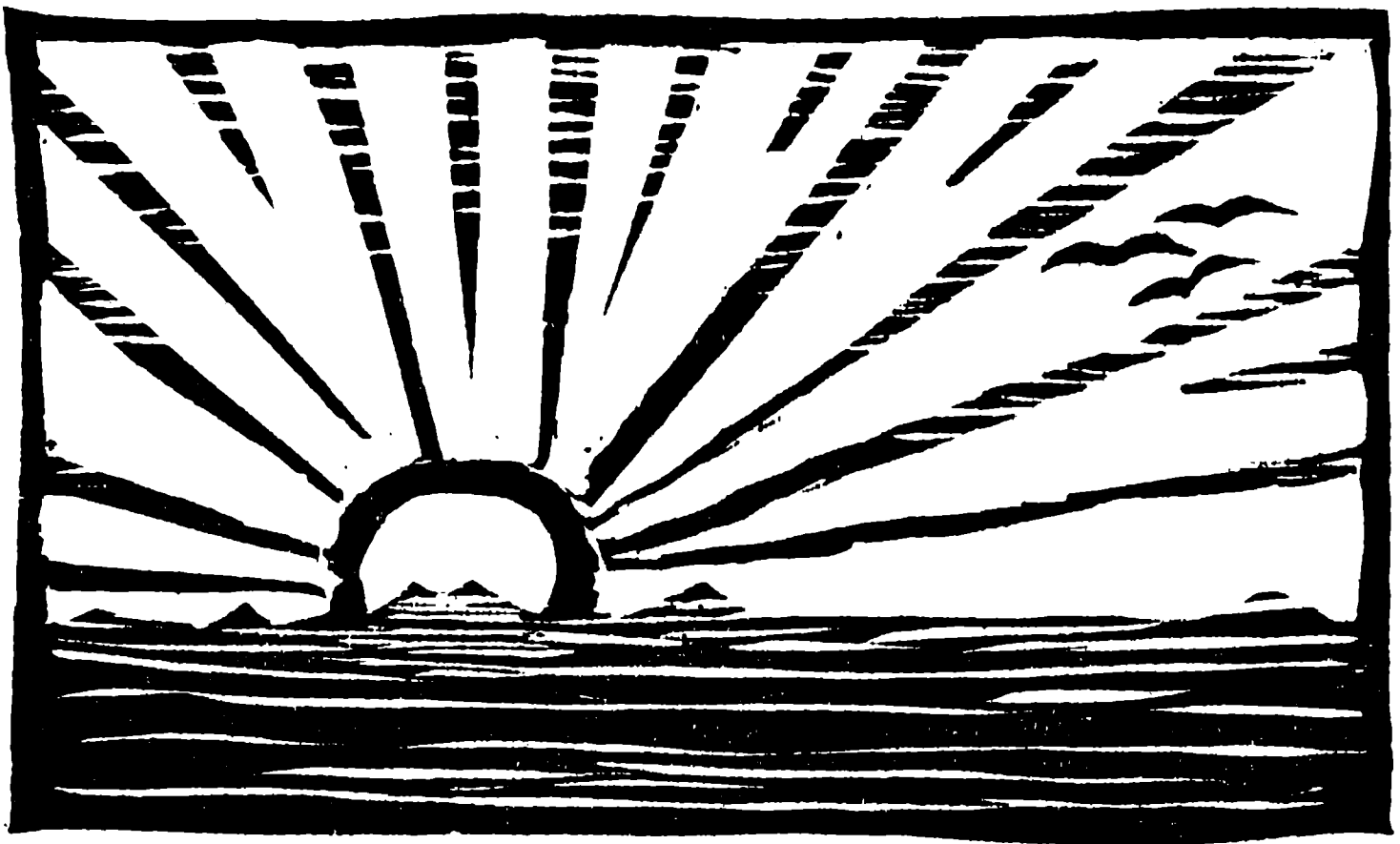
I deal death, and I bring to life;  
I have wounded, and I heal;  
And there is none that can deliver  
out of My hand.

"Sing aloud, O you nations, of His  
people;  
For He avenges the blood of His  
servants,  
And renders vengeance to His  
enemies,  
And clears guilt from the land of  
His people."

🔔 [9] VENGEANCE IS MINE: When Israel sins, he will be punished, for he is failing to live up to the Covenant, said the Rabbis.

They also derived a second meaning from this verse: man must never take revenge, for this is God's privilege alone. In taking vengeance, man sins anew. His revenge is a fresh crime which may in itself call forth vengeance.

הַרְגִּינוּ גוֹיִם עָמוּ, כִּי דַם עֲבָדָיו יִקּוּם, וְנָקָם יֵשֵׁב לְצָרָיו וְכִפֹּר אֲדָמָתוֹ עָמוּ.



## 28. DEUTERONOMY [32-34]

### IT IS YOUR LIFE

AND WHEN MOSES finished speaking the words of this song to all Israel, he and Hoshea [Joshua], [1] the son of Nun, he said to them, "Take to heart all the

things of which I warn you today, that you may instruct your children to observe all the words of this Torah. For it is not an empty thing [2] for you, because it is your life; [3] and through this you shall lengthen your days upon the land which you go to possess."

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[1] WHY IS JOSHUA CALLED HOSHEA? Our Sages explain that Hoshea was Joshua's childhood name and this serves to clarify Joshua's relationship to Moses. Although Joshua was now leader of his people and a man of stature and position, he still gave Moses the same respect he gave him when a youth.

[1] HE AND HOSHEA: At the beginning of the great song, Moses alone is speaking, but at its close, both Moses and Joshua speak. The Tal-

כִּי לֹא דָבָר יֶרֶק הוּא מִכֶּם, כִּי הוּא חַיִּיכֶם וּבְדָבָר הַזֶּה תֵּאָרִיכוּ יָמִים.

## MOUNT NEBO

AND THE LORD said to Moses that self-same day, [4] "Ascend Mount Nebo,

which is in the land of Moab facing Jericho; and view the land of Canaan which I am giving to the Children of Israel as a possession. And you will die

mud considers this the occasion when Moses transferred his authority to Joshua. He chose to establish Joshua as leader in his own lifetime, so that none might say that this was not Moses' choice.

🔗 [2] IT IS NOT AN EMPTY THING: Moses was careful to point out that his words were more than poetry or sermonizing. They are law; and as man lives by it or fails to live by it, his life is affected.

Rashi puns on the phrase, "an empty thing," making it read, "an empty word." There is not an empty word in the whole Torah, he says. One may not decide to obey this Torah regulation, but not that; for there is not one word in the Torah which, if properly interpreted, will not prove to be of profound value.

Rashi's point of view was in keeping with the Rabbis' teachings that all wisdom could be found in the Torah, if one searched wisely. "Turn it, turn it, for all is in it," they said.

🔗 [3] IT IS YOUR LIFE: An aged woman asked a rabbi, "I am too old to live, but cannot die. How can I find death?"

The rabbi asked how she had reached her advanced years. "My father trained me in the Torah," she replied, "and I study in it every day. Moreover, no matter what the day holds, I pray in the synagogue regularly."

"Do not study and do not pray for three days," said the rabbi. The old woman obeyed; she refrained from study and prayer. On the third day she died.

The old woman symbolizes the community of Israel, which lives only because of the Torah and the Synagogue. Should Israel abandon Torah and prayer, she will find a speedy death.

וַיֵּרָא אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֻחָזָה.

on the mountain and be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor. Because you broke faith with Me among the Children of Israel at the waters of Meribath-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because you did not sanctify Me among the Children of

Israel. For you shall see the land afar off, but you shall not go into the land which I am giving the Children of Israel!" [5]

#### THE BLESSING OF MOSES

AND THIS IS the blessing with which

❧ [4] THAT SELFSAME DAY: The Rabbis interpreted this phrase to mean, "in the middle of the day," and taking place before the eyes of all. The expression, "the selfsame day," occurs only three times in the Bible.

Three great events recorded in the Pentateuch had to take place before the eyes of all the people: the Flood, which teaches that only a righteous humanity can survive; the Exodus, which teaches that man must be free; and Moses' death, from which we learn that even the Prophet chosen of God must die, and that the people must rely on no one man.

In the first case, Noah's warnings of the coming flood had been in vain. The scoffers even threatened to prevent him from entering the ark. Hence, God did not command Noah to embark at night, when he might climb aboard unseen, but in broad daylight. Noah and his family braved the mob, and calmly went aboard at noontime.

In the second instance, the departure from Egypt, the Hebrews' former masters awoke as from a stupor, and cried, "Our slaves are leaving! Let us take our whips, and drive them back to their labors!" The Hebrews might have waited for night to slip out of Egypt, but they marched out at noon.

Third, when Moses was commanded to ascend Mount Nebo, the Children of Israel realized that he was leaving them forever. They cried out in anguish for their beloved leader not to leave them. Moses did not wait for night: at midday he turned his steps toward the peak; and not a hand could be raised to restrain him, though every eye saw him go.

כִּי מֵנֶגֶד תִּרְאֶה אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁמָּה לֹא תָבוֹא, אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.



Moses, the man of God, blessed the  
Children of Israel before his death:

“The Lord came from Sinai,  
And rose from Seir to them;  
He shone from Mount Paran,  
And He came from the holy  
myriads,  
At His right hand lightning flashed  
for them.

“Yea, He loves the peoples;  
All His holy ones—they are in Thy  
hand;  
And they sit down at Thy feet,  
Receiving Thy words.

Moses commanded us the Torah,  
A heritage for the congregation of  
Jacob.

“There is none like God,  
O Yeshurun,  
Who rides upon the heavens as  
your help,  
And in His grandeur on the skies.  
The eternal God is a dwelling-  
place,  
And underneath are the everlast-  
ing arms;  
And He thrust out the enemy from  
before you.

❧ [5] YOU SHALL NOT GO: According to legend, Moses was grief-stricken that he could not enter the Promised Land. “Let me enter the land,” he begged. “Have I not served You these years in the wilderness?”

“The giving of the Torah was accomplished,” God answered, “and the time for conquest and settlement has come. Therefore, Joshua must take over.”

“Let Joshua be the leader and I will serve him,” Moses pleaded. The next morning he rose early to prepare Joshua’s garments, and to sweep the Tabernacle. Joshua was startled to see Moses acting as his servant. “Only by serving you,” Moses explained, “can I enter the Promised Land.”

As Joshua stood in the Tabernacle, the voice of God spoke to him. As the new leader stood, silent and awed, Moses asked the reason. “God is speaking to me,” Joshua replied. “Do you not hear His voice?”

A wave of envy came over Moses, for he had not heard. And then he prayed to God, “I forgo the privilege of entering Canaan. Better I die, than live in envy.”

תּוֹרָה צִוָּה לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה, מוֹרָשָׁה קִהַּלַּת יִצְקָב.

“And Israel dwells in safety,  
The fountain of Jacob apart,  
In a land of corn and wine;  
And His heavens drop down dew.  
Happy are you, O Israel! Who is  
like you?  
A people saved by the Lord.”

#### THE DEATH OF MOSES

AND MOSES WENT up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit, which faces Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, even Gilead as far as Dan.

And the Lord said to him, “This is the land which I promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying: ‘I will give it to your children.’ I have let you look upon it, but you shall not go over there.”

So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there [6] by command of the Lord.

And he was buried in the valley of the land of Moab; and to this day no one knows his burial place.

And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died: neither were his eyes dimmed nor his vigor lessened.

And the Children of Israel wept thirty days for Moses in the plains of Moab. And Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Children of Israel obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face; in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants and to all his land; and in all the mighty hand and in all the wonders, which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel.

✍ [6] MOSES DIED THERE: The Rabbis maintained that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch. How could he have written of his own death? Some Rabbis said that Joshua wrote these lines, others that God had dictated the last verses to Moses, whose final act on earth was to write them down, his eyes blurred with tears. This done, he calmly climbed Mount Nebo.

HAZAK, HAZAK, V'NIT-HAZEK

וְלִכְל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וְלִכְל הַמִּזְרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינָיו כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

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**THE RABBIS' BIBLE**

*Volume Two: Early Prophets*





# THE RABBIS' BIBLE

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## **VOLUME TWO: EARLY PROPHETS**

*Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles*

*by Solomon Simon and Morrison David Bial*  
*woodcuts by Irwin Rosenhouse*

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# PREFACE

*Turn it, turn it again and again, for everything is in it.  
Contemplate it, grow gray and old over it, for there is  
no greater good.*

PIRKÉ AVOT 5:25

THE BIBLE is a world in itself, rich, deep, wide, fulfilling. In a time when men are overwhelmed and surfeited with facts and find them unsatisfying, even setting the teeth on edge, the return to acquiring values built out of encounters with the world of the Bible and its wisdom is even more important.

This edition of the Biblical books, which deals with judges, kings and the early prophets, is intended as a textbook and companion for the young and adult study group, as well as a book for reflective individuals who seek the quiet pools and turbulent rapids of our millennia of Jewish history and religion. An abridged version of the Bible is arranged as continuous text across the tops of the pages with a continuing keyed commentary at the bottoms. That commentary explores the vast literature of post-Biblical interpretation and includes the two Talmuds, the Midrashim, medieval and modern Jewish commentary, as well as legend and folklore. Together Biblical text and commentary reinforce each other and out of their separate strands weave three thousand years of Jewish wisdom and tradition.

The Bible never tells a story for its own sake nor delivers stirring poetry for poetic grandeur alone; each verse is meant to teach a lesson, point a moral, record an important event or folk memory in the

history of the Jewish people. With that in mind we have included law, history, ritual and ceremony—everything that bears on God and the Covenant, on ethical precepts and moral conduct, for there lies the Bible's central core and wisdom: Live rightly or die.

#### NOTE

The text is a new translation which avoids archaism but does no violence to the Biblical context by awkward colloquialism. Nor does the abridgment compromise the narrative or moral shape of the Scriptures as a whole. Occasionally verses have been slightly rearranged to provide for a more coherent narrative or moral shape of the Scriptures as a whole. This is especially the case in this volume in the use of the Book of Chronicles to support and broaden the historical books of Samuel and Kings. Biblical and place names are spelled as in the Jewish Publication Society (1917) translation. Otherwise the modern Sephardic pronunciation is used for Hebrew transliteration.

A Teacher's Resource Book has been prepared to make the study of the Bible even more accessible and meaningful to a contemporary reader. It clarifies the more profound meanings and subtle philosophies, the complex meaning of words and places, embodied in what is often a symbolic and hyperbolic Scriptural text. What is offered, then, is not apologetics but interpretation rich in ancient lore and replete with modern scholarship, so that throughout the student, teacher and reader will find new insight and understanding of the relevance of the Bible.

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## 1. JOSHUA [1-6]

THE COMMAND TO CROSS  
THE JORDAN

IT WAS AFTER the death of Moses, [1]  
the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke

to Joshua, the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses, saying:

"Moses, My servant is dead. And now, arise and cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which

---

[1] AFTER THE DEATH OF MOSES: In the days of mourning following Moses' death, many ordinances confused the people and they pleaded with Joshua to recall to them the forgotten ordinances and to explain the difficult passages. When he could not, the people sought to kill him. So Joshua prayed to the Lord, "Let Thy holy spirit descend upon me to explain the passages and to repeat what has been forgotten so that I may make these things known to the people." But God refused. Then Joshua reminded the people: "Torah is not in heaven but on earth. The commandments which the Lord gave you

מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי מָתָּה. וְעַתָּה קוּם עֲבַר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה, אַתָּה וְכָל הָעָם הַזֶּה.

I promised to give [2] to the Children of Israel. Every place which the sole of your foot [3] shall tread I will give to you, as I said to Moses. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you, nor forsake you. Be strong and brave, because

you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them. Only be strong and very courageous [4] to observe and do according to the whole Torah, that My servant Moses commanded you. Turn not from it to the right nor to the left, that you may succeed wherever you go.

are neither hidden from your eye nor beyond your reach (Deuteronomy 30:11-12). Use the strength of mind with which He has endowed you to discover the commandments for yourself."

☞ [2] WHICH I GIVE: Why does God once more point out that He is now giving the Children of Israel the land which He had long ago promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Because the Lord did not specify to the Patriarchs which generation of their descendants would inherit the Promised Land. Those who left Egypt with Moses were unworthy but the new generation had proved deserving and had sealed its bond by readiness to obey God's injunction.

☞ [3] THE SOLE OF YOUR FOOT: When the Israelites were about to enter Canaan, the Lord commanded them to destroy its inhabitants utterly. They were neither to show them mercy nor make treaties with them, so that the Israelites might not be infected by the Canaanite pagan abominations (Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:17-18). But Joshua, remembering Moses' treatment of Sihon and Og, instead proclaimed to all Canaan that any nation which chose to leave the land might do so unhindered, that any nation which wanted to make peace could conclude a peace treaty immediately, and that any nation which chose war ought to make ready for it.

☞ [4] BE STRONG AND VERY COURAGEOUS: God repeats this admonition and stresses courage. Conquering the land will take courage but

חֹזֶק וְאַמֵּץ, כִּי אַתָּה תִּנְחִיל אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם  
לָתֵת לָהֶם.

This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall meditate on it day and night, [5] so that you may observe to do all that is written in it; for then you shall make your ways prosperous and you shall succeed.

JOSHUA SENDS SPIES

JOSHUA SENT two spies [6] secretly, and said to them: “Go and look to the land and the city of Jericho.”  
They went and came to the house of

conquering the problems of living according to God’s law will require even more bravery. Living a life of dignity and honor requires more courage than going forth to battle. The Rabbis wisely noted that the greatest fortitude is required to live according to the Torah, to do good deeds, to pray and to perform one’s social tasks; in short, to live a righteous life.

🕒 [5] MEDITATE ON IT DAY AND NIGHT: The Romans condemned Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai to death because he had censured their rule and so Ben Yoḥai and his son fled for their lives. They hid in a cave for twelve years, eating the dry fruit of a carob tree and drinking water from a nearby stream. They spent all their waking hours in prayer and study of the Torah. After twelve years the decree was annulled and they left their cave to return to their native city. On the way they passed farmers tilling their fields and exclaimed: “Those people still neglect the eternal life and busy themselves with transient things.” Shocked, Ben Yoḥai burst out: “Let these fields that lure men away from the study of the Torah be burned!” Instantly, flame from heaven consumed the fields. But then a voice from heaven was heard: “Did you come out of your cave to destroy My world? You have sinned by detaching yourself from daily life. Back to your cave!” There Ben Yoḥai was kept for twelve months, the maximum time a transgressor may be kept in Gehenna.

🕒 [6] TWO SPIES: Moses had sent twelve spies to search out the land; Joshua sent only two. The difference in number was because Moses wished to test the spirit of the Israelites to see if they were ready to

לא ימוש סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ, וְהָגִיתָ בוֹ יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה.

a woman whose name was Rahab [7] and lodged there. The woman hid the men. She brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax which she spread out upon the roof.

The king of Jericho was told, "Some men came here tonight from the Children of Israel to spy out the land." The king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying: "Bring out the men who came to you, because they came to spy out the whole land." And she answered and said: "True, the men did come to me, but I did not know where they came from. When it was about time to close the gate of the city, just before dark, the men went out; whither they went I do not know. Hurry, pursue them, you may overtake them." And the king's men pursued the spies to the Jordan. When the pursuers had gone out, the city gate was closed.

Before the spies went to sleep, she

went up to them on the roof, and said: "I know that the Lord has given you the land. Your terror has fallen upon us, because we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds before you when you came out of Egypt. We also know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, on the other side of the Jordan—you destroyed them. When we heard of it, our hearts did melt, and no courage was left in any man. For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and the earth below. Now, since I dealt kindly with you, swear to me by your Lord that you will also deal kindly with my father's household. Give me a true token that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, with all that belong to them."

And the men said to her: "Our lives for yours, if you will not tell about our errand. When the Lord will give us this

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enter the Promised Land, but Joshua was concerned only to find out the preparedness of the Canaanites. Joshua chose Caleb, who had gone with him on his first reconnaissance, and Phinehas the priest. They traveled to Jericho disguised as peddlers of pots. Some Sages say that the men did not sell pots (*heres*) but acted as if they were deaf and dumb (*hérésh*) because Joshua feared that if they spoke they might betray themselves by their accents.

🔥 [7] RAHAB: The Lord rewarded Rahab for two other reasons besides the fact that she had hidden and saved Joshua's spies. First, because

וְנִשְׁמַע וַיִּמַּס לְבָבָנוּ וְלֹא קָמָה עוֹד רוּחַ בְּאִישׁ מִפְּנֵיכֶם, כִּי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא  
אֱלֹהִים בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת.

land, we will deal kindly and truly with you.”

Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was part of the city wall. And she said to them: “Go to the mountains; otherwise the pursuers might chance upon you. Hide in the mountain for three days until the pursuers return.”

And the men said to her: “When we shall return to the land, you shall tie this line of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down. And you shall gather into your house your father, your mother, your brothers, your sisters, all your father’s household. And it shall be that whoever will go out of the door of your house into the street,

his blood shall be on his head, and we will be guiltless. And if you tell of our errand, we will not be bound by our oath that you made us swear.”

She said: “So be it.” She sent them away, and she tied the scarlet line in the window.

And the men went into the mountains and waited there for three days, until the pursuers returned. The pursuers searched every road, but found nothing. Then the two men went down the mountain and crossed the Jordan, and came to Joshua. They told him all that had befallen them, and said: “Truly, the Lord has delivered the whole land into our hand. All the inhabitants [8] have lost heart before us.”

when the spies came to her house, she repented her sins and acknowledged the greatness of the Lord. Second, when Rahab pleaded for mercy she asked for the lives of her parents and family before asking for her own. Therefore God rewarded her.

The Midrash recounts that she confessed her sins: “I have sinned with the wall, the window and the rope. My house is on the wall that surrounds the city. My window faces out on the open country. At night I leave it open with a rope suspended from it. Brigands and thieves climb up the rope into my house to bring me their stolen goods to sell. Now, Lord, I have used all these things with which I did evil to do good—wall, window and rope—to save these two men, so forgive my transgressions.”

🔗 [8] ALL THE INHABITANTS: How could Rahab know that all the inhabitants were frightened? The Midrash tells us that there was

נָתַן יי בִּידָנוּ אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ וְגַם נִמּוּגוּ כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵינוּ.

## JOSHUA COMMANDS THE PEOPLE TO GET READY

JOSHUA COMMANDED the officers of the people: "Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare yourselves with supplies, because within three days you are going to cross the Jordan to enter the land which the Lord God gives you to possess it.'"

## ISRAEL CROSSES THE JORDAN

AND JOSHUA awoke early in the morning, and he and all the Children of Israel set out from their camp and reached the Jordan and passed the night there before crossing.

At the end of the three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people: "When you see the

priests and the Levites carrying the Ark of the Covenant [9] of the Lord your God you shall follow it. There should be a space between you and the Ark, about two thousand cubits. Come not nearer to it."

And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders in your midst." And to the priests Joshua said: "Take up the Ark of the Covenant and go ahead of the people."

The Jordan was full at that time, overflowing its banks as always in the time of harvest. And the priests took the Ark of the Covenant and went ahead of the people. The people left their tents and followed. As the feet of the priests who carried the Ark dipped into the edge of the stream the waters flowing down from above stood up and rose up

neither an officer nor an official who did not visit Rahab's inn and who did not speak his mind there when drunk.

✎ [9] THE ARK OF THE COVENANT: When the Israelites left the desert, the manna ceased to rain. Had the manna not ceased, the people would not have eaten the produce of the land and become part of it. And they would have continued to rely on miracles instead of working the land to make it yield.

In the time of Moses, they had been guided by pillars of cloud and fire, but now they would no longer be guided by miracles. Instead, they would be guided by the Ark of the Covenant which would be carried by the priests.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל הָעָם: הִתְקַדְּשׁוּ, כִּי מָחָר יַעֲשֶׂה יְיָ בְּקִרְבְּכֶם נִפְלְאוֹת.

in one heap; and the waters flowing down toward the sea were wholly cut off. The people crossed the Jordan opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan until the whole nation crossed the Jordan.

And the men of the tribe of Reuben and the men of the tribe of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over around before the Children of Israel, as Moses spoke to them. About forty thousand armed men crossed over to the plains of Jericho to do battle.

#### THE TWELVE STONES

AND IT WAS when the entire nation crossed the Jordan, the priests who carried the Ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan. They stood there until all was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak to the people.

And Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the Children of Israel, a man from each tribe, and he said to them:

"Go over before the Ark of the Lord your God, in the middle of the Jordan, and every man lift a stone and put it on his shoulder." And they did as Joshua commanded them.

They took twelve stones from the

middle of the Jordan, and carried them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.

And the Lord said to Joshua: "Command the priests who carry the Ark that they come out of the Jordan."

And Joshua commanded the priests, saying: "Come up out of the Jordan."

And it was that as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests touched dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

The people crossed the Jordan in the tenth day of the first month, and camped in Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho. And the twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. And he said to the Children of Israel: "When the children will ask their fathers in time to come, 'What is the meaning of these stones?' then you shall let your children know that Israel crossed the Jordan on dry land, for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Sea of Reeds when we came out of Egypt."

On that day the Lord magnified

וְהוֹדַעְתֶּם אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לֵאמֹר: בַּיַּבָּשָׁה עָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה.



Joshua in the sight of Israel. They revered him as they revered Moses all the days of his life.

#### THE PASSOVER

WHEN THE Children of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, in the plains of Jericho. They ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened cakes and parched wheat, and the manna ceased. And the Children of Israel had no more manna but they ate of the produce of the land of Canaan.

#### AN ANGEL APPEARS TO JOSHUA

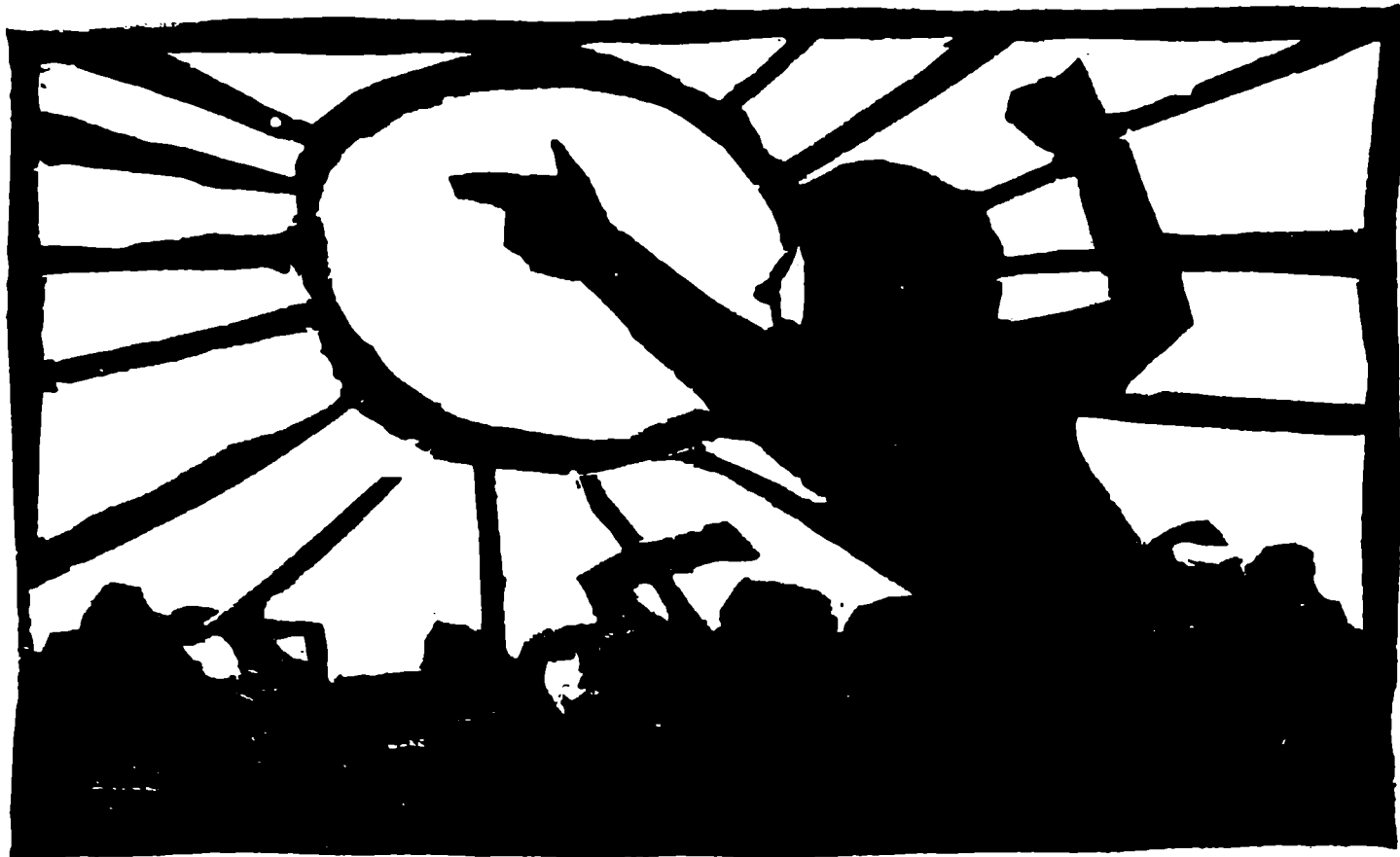
NOW JERICHO was shut up tight, because of the Children of Israel. None went out and none came in. And it was when Joshua was near Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in

his hand. And Joshua came to him, saying: "Are you for us or for our enemies?" And the man said: "No, I am captain of the host of the Lord."

And Joshua prostrated himself. The captain of the Lord's host said to him: "Take your shoes from off your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

And the Lord said to Joshua: "See, I have given into your hand Jericho and its king, and all her men of valor. Now, take all your men of war and go around the city once. And seven priests shall carry seven ram's horns. Thus shall you do for six days. On the seventh day you shall go around the city seven times and each time the priests shall blow the *Shofars*. And at the seventh time when you hear the sound of a long blast of the *Shofar*, all the people shall shout with a great shout. The wall of the city shall fall down flat, so that every man can go straight into the city from where he stands.

יָרִיעוּ כָּל הָעָם תְּרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה, וְנָפְלָה חוֹמַת הָעִיר תַּחְתֵּיהָ, וְעָלוּ הָעָם אִישׁ  
נִגְדוֹ.



## 2. JOSHUA [6-10]

### THE WALL OF JERICHO FALLS

AND JOSHUA called the priests and said to them: "Take up the Ark of the Covenant and let seven priests carry seven ram's horns before the Ark of the Lord." And to the people he said: "Pass on and go around the city, and the armed troops shall go before the Ark of the Lord. But you shall not shout nor let a word leave your mouth until the day I bid you shout. Only then you shall shout."

And Joshua rose early in the morning and the priests carried the Ark of the Lord. Seven priests, carrying seven ram's horns before the Ark of the Lord, went on sounding the *Shofars* continuously.

The armed men went before them and the rear guard followed the Ark of the Lord. And they went around the city once and returned to the camp. Thus they did for six days.

On the seventh day they arose early, at daybreak, and marched around the city seven times. And it was when the priests blew the *Shofars* the seventh time that Joshua said to the people: "Shout! for the Lord has given you the city. And the city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the Lord. But Rahab shall be spared and all that are in her house, because she hid the messengers that we sent."

And the people shouted a great shout

הָרִיעוּ! כִּי נָתַן יְיָ לָכֶם אֶת הָעִיר.

and the *Shofars* were blown. The walls of the city fell flat, so the people went into the city, each man from the place where he stood; and they captured the city. And the spies went into Rahab's house and brought out Rahab, her father, mother, her brethren, and all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. She has lived among Israel [1] to this day. And they burned the city with fire and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of brass and iron they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.

#### THE CURSE ON JERICHO

AT THAT TIME Joshua charged the people to swear, saying: Cursed be the man before the Lord who undertakes to rebuild the city Jericho. With the loss of his first born shall he lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he erect its gates.

And the Lord was with Joshua so that his fame spread throughout the entire land.

#### WAR ON AI

AND THE LORD said to Joshua: "Take all

the men of war and go up against Ai. I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land."

Joshua chose thirty thousand of the most valiant warriors and sent them by night, and he commanded them, saying: "See, you are to lie in ambush against the city and be ready. I and all the people with me will approach the city, and when they come out against us, we shall flee from them. And we will flee until we have drawn them away. Then you shall rise up from your ambush and seize the city. And when you have taken the city, you shall set it afire. This have I commanded you."

Then Joshua sent them away, and they went to the ambush.

Joshua rose early in the morning. He inspected the people, and he and the elders went up before the people to Ai. Then men of war who were with him went up and encamped on the north side of the city. When the king of Ai saw this, he hastened the men of the city, and they went out against Israel to do battle. Joshua and his men acted as though they were beaten by them, and fled by way of the wilderness. And all the people who were in the city were summoned together to pursue after

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🔍 [1] SHE HAS LIVED AMONG ISRAEL: Rahab dwelt outside the camp of Israel until her conversion to Judaism. It was after that that

אָרוֹר הָאִישׁ לִפְנֵי יְיָ אֲשֶׁר יָקוּם וּבָנָה אֶת הָעִיר הַזֹּאת אֶת יְרִיחוֹ. בְּבָכוֹרוֹ  
יִסְדְּנָה וּבְצַעֲרוֹ יִצִּיב דִּלְתֶיהָ.

them. And they pursued after Israel; and there was not a man left in Ai.

And the Lord said to Joshua: "Stretch out the spear in your hand toward Ai, for I will give Ai into your hand." And Joshua signaled with his spear, and the men in ambush rose quickly from their place, and entered the city and took it, and set it on fire. When the people of Ai turned and saw the smoke of the city rising to heaven, they became confused and knew not which way to flee, this way or that.

And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city was rising, they turned back. And the others came out of the city, so the people of Ai were in the midst of Israel. And they defeated the people of Ai. Not one remained to escape. And the king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua.

And it was when Israel defeated the inhabitants of Ai on the field of battle, they returned and destroyed the city and raised a great heap of stones over it, that stands to this day.

#### JOSHUA BUILDS AN ALTAR

THEN JOSHUA built an altar to the Lord the God of Israel on Mount Ebal, an altar of unhewn stones [2] on which no iron tool was lifted, as it is written in the book of the Torah of Moses. And he wrote upon the stones a copy of the Torah of Moses. And all Israel, their elders, officers and their judges, the stranger and the home-born, stood on each side of the Ark, opposite the priests and Levites who carry the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord—half of the people in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded to bless the people of Israel.

And he read all the words of the Torah, the blessing and the curse.

#### THE GIBEONITES

WHEN THE INHABITANTS of Gibeon heard [3] what Joshua did to Jericho and Ai, they acted cunningly. They

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Joshua gave her land as an inheritance and that she became one with Israel.

☞ [2] UNHEWN STONES: Why did Joshua make this altar without iron? The Rabbis tell us that the altar is the symbol of reconciliation between God and man, between man and man, woman and man,

וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן קָרָא אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה, הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה.

took old sacks and put them on their donkeys and wine skins worn, cracked and patched. They put on their feet worn shoes and worn garments on their backs. For their provisions they took dry bread, spotted with mold. And they went to Joshua, to the camp of Gilgal and they said to him and to the men of Israel: "We have come from a far country, and now make a covenant with us."

And Joshua said to them: "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

And they said: "Your servants have come from a far-off country because we heard the name of the Lord your God and all that He did in Egypt to Sihon, king of Heshbon and to Og, king of Bashan. And the elders and all the in-

habitants of our country said to us: 'Take provisions on your journey and go to meet them and say to them: We are your servants and now make a covenant with us.' We took for our provisions this bread which you see. When we left, it was hot out of our houses, but now it is dry and moldy. These wine skins were new when we filled them, but now they are dry and cracked. These garments and our shoes are worn out from the very long journey."

And the princes of Israel broke bread with them and Joshua made a covenant of peace with them, and the princes of the congregation swore to observe the Covenant.

Three days after the covenant was

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nation and nation. Because the sword is a weapon of iron made to kill, iron should not therefore be used on the altar of reconciliation.

❧ [3] THE GIBEONITES HEARD: The sly Gibeonites said: "We will trick the Israelites into making a treaty with us. If they keep their oath and do not make war, they will break their God's commandment to make war on any nation that does not sue for peace immediately after Joshua's proclamation. If they declare war on us, their God will be angry at them for breaking their word. Whichever they do, they incur the wrath of their God." According to law, the Israelites might have broken their solemn oath because the Gibeonites extracted their promise by deceit. But the Israelites kept their bargain so that the nations of Canaan might see that they kept their bargains and remained true to their word even in the face of the duplicity of those with whom they dealt.

מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה בָּאוּ, וַעֲתָה כְּרָתוּ לָנוּ בְרִית.

made, they heard that they were neighbors and were dwelling among them. And the Children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. And the whole congregation of Israel murmured against the princes. But all the princes of Israel said to the congregation: "We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. Now we cannot touch them. We shall do as we have sworn."

And Joshua called for them and said: "Why did you deceive us by telling us that you live far from us when you dwell among us?"

And they answered Joshua: "Because it was told your servants how the Lord your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land. Therefore, we were very much afraid of our lives and so we have done this. And now we are all in your hands. Do to us whatever you think is right and fair."

And he saved them from the hands of the Children of Israel, so they did not slay them. And the princes said: "Let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water to the whole congregation. Let them live."

And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord.

#### GIBEON IS ATTACKED

WHEN ADONI-ZEDEK, king of Jerusalem, heard that Joshua captured Ai and destroyed it, as he had done to Jericho, and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, he became greatly frightened because Gibeon was a great city, one of the royal cities. It was larger than Ai, and all her men were valiant warriors. So Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent this message to the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish and the king of Eglon:

"Come up to me and help me. Let us attack Gibeon and destroy it, because it made peace with Joshua and the Children of Israel." And all the five kings of the Amorites gathered together and then went up with their armies and encamped against Gibeon. And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp of Gilgal, saying: "Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and help us and save us, for all the kings of the Amorites who inhabit the hill country are gathered together against us."

#### SUN AND MOON STAND STILL!

AND JOSHUA went up from Gilgal, he and all the people with him and all the men of valor. And the Lord said to

וַיַּעַל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ מִן הַגִּלְגָּל, הוּא וְכָל עַם הַמִּלְחָמָה עִמּוֹ וְכָל גִּבּוֹרֵי הָחַיִּל.

Joshua: "Fear not, for I have delivered them in your hand; not a man of them shall stand up against you."

And Joshua came upon them suddenly, for he marched from Gilgal all the night. And the Lord threw them into a panic before Israel, and they were defeated in a great battle at Gibeon. And when they fled before Israel the Lord cast down great stones from the sky upon them. There were more who died from hailstones than from the swords of the Children of Israel [but the sun began to set].

Then Joshua called out in the pres-

ence of the Children of Israel and said in their sight:

"Sun, stand still [4] upon Gibeon!  
Moon, in the valley of Aijalon!"

And the sun stood still,

And the moon waited.

Is this not written in the book of Jashar? The sun stayed in the midst of the sky and hastened not to go down about a full day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, a day that the Lord heeded the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel.

And Joshua and all Israel with him returned to the camp at Gilgal.

☞ [4] SUN, STAND STILL: How can the sun stand still when that is against the laws of its nature? God foresaw that Joshua would need a longer day to complete his victory, the Midrash tells us, and arranged it with the sun before the sun was created.

Joshua saw that the battle might be prolonged into the Sabbath so he had the sun stand still to keep the holy day inviolate.

שֶׁמֶשׁ בְּגִבְעוֹן – יוֹם! יָרֵחַ, בְּעֵמֶק אֵילָן.



### 3. JOSHUA [10-24]

#### JOSHUA CONQUERS CANAAN

AND JOSHUA conquered all the land, the hill country, all the south, the lowland, and valleys. Joshua made war a long time with the kings of Canaan. There was not a city that made peace with the Children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. At that time Joshua defeated the Anakim, the giants from the hill country of Hebron, and destroyed them and their cities. Joshua conquered the whole land as the Lord spoke to Moses. Joshua was victorious

over thirty-one kings, all of them, and possessed their land.

So the land had rest from war.

#### THE DIVISION OF THE LAND

AND JOSHUA was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord said to him: "Now divide this land as an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh." And the half-tribe of Manasseh received their inheritance which Moses gave to them, with the tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Gad on the other side of the Jordan.

וַיָּכֶה יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת כָּל הָאֲרָץ, הָהָר וְהַנֶּגֶב וְהַשְּׁפֵלָה וְהָאֲשָׁדוֹת.



And the whole congregation of the Children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up there the Tent of Meeting. And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh, before the Lord. And there Joshua divided the land to the Children of Israel.

And the heads of the families of the Levites went up to Eleazar the priest and Joshua there in Shiloh, and they spoke to them: "The Lord commanded through Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with open land for our cattle."

And the Children of Israel gave the Levites some of their own inheritance, cities with open land about them. For the Levites were not given a separate portion in the conquered land, as the Lord commanded Moses.

#### TRIBES ACROSS THE JORDAN

THEN JOSHUA called the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh and said to them: "You have observed all that Moses commanded you and have obeyed all that I have commanded you. You have not forsaken your brethren during these many days. Now the Lord your God has given rest to your brethren, as He promised them; therefore, return to your tents, to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you across the Jordan. But observe very carefully

the Torah that Moses commanded you, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments; to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul."

Joshua blessed them and sent them away.

#### ALTAR BEYOND THE JORDAN

WHEN THE children of Reuben, the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh came to the region of the Jordan they built there a great altar by the Jordan, facing the land of Canaan.

When they heard of it, the whole congregation of the Children of Israel gathered in Shiloh to go up against them to war.

And the Children of Israel sent to Reuben and to Gad and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten princes, a prince from each tribe. They came to these tribes and they spoke to them:

"Thus said the whole congregation of the Lord. You rebelled today against of God of Israel in that you have built you an altar. Because of you tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. If the land of your possession is unclean, [you will not sanctify it by this rebellion;] it would be better if you were to cross over into the

וַעֲתָה הַנִּיחַ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְאַחֵיכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָהֶם, וְעַתָּה פָּנוּ וּלְכוּ לָכֶם  
לְאַהֲלֵיכֶם.

land of the possession of the Lord where the Tabernacle of the Lord is. Do not rebel against the Lord by building another altar."

Then the children of Reuben, of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered: "The God, the Lord God knows, and all Israel shall know, that we built the altar because of our fear and anxiety. In time to come your children might say to our children: 'What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? For the Lord made the Jordan a border between us and you. You have no share in the Lord. Your children will prevent our children from fearing the Lord.' Therefore, we said: 'Let us now build us an altar, not for sacrifice; but it shall be a witness between us and you and the generations after us! If your children will say to our children: 'You have no share in the Lord,' they will say: 'Look at the altar of the Lord which our fathers made, not for sacrifice, but as a witness between us

and you.' Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord, and build an altar for sacrificing beside the altar of the Lord that is before His Tabernacle."

When Phinehas the priest [1] and the heads of the tribes of Israel heard the words from the Reubenites, Gadites and the children of Manasseh, it pleased them well, and Phinehas said to them: "Now we know that the Lord is in our midst, for you have not rebelled against the Lord."

#### JOSHUA WARNS THE PEOPLE

AND IT WAS when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies, and Joshua was old, that he called all Israel, their elders, their heads, their judges and their officers and said to them: "I am old, well advanced in years, and you have seen [2] all that the Lord has done to all these nations. For the Lord, your God has fought for you. I have allotted to you as inheri-

🔗 [1] PHINEHAS THE PRIEST: Whenever Phinehas' name was mentioned before, it was followed by "the son of Eleazar." Here, for the first time, he is called "the priest" without his father's name appended because, having brought peace between the tribes, he had earned the title in his own right.

🔗 [2] YOU HAVE SEEN: The generation that had experienced the Exodus was dead. Those who now stood before Joshua were their

רָאוּ אֶת תְּבִיטַת מִזְבֵּחַ יְיָ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לֹא לְעוֹלָה וְלֹא לְזֶבֶחַ, כִּי עַד הוּא בְּיָמֵינוּ וּבְיָמֵיכֶם.

tance all the land from the Jordan to the great sea at the west, the land of the nations I conquered and the land of the nations that remain. The Lord your God will drive them out and you will possess their land, as the Lord your God has promised you. Therefore, you shall strive to observe and do all that is written in the book of the Torah of Moses. You shall not turn to the right or to the left. You shall not mingle with the nations who remain among you. You shall not mention the names of their gods, nor swear by them. Only to the Lord your God shall you cleave as you have done to this day. The Lord has driven from before you great and mighty nations so that no one has stood against you to this day. One man of you chased a thousand, for the Lord your God, He has fought for you as He promised you. Therefore, take great care that you shall love the Lord your God.

"But if you turn back and attach yourselves to the remnant of the nations that remains among you, and you intermarry with them, then you shall know that the Lord your God will no longer

drive these nations from before you. They shall be a snare and a trap to you, a scourge in your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you.

"Behold this day I am to go the way of all the earth. But you know with all your heart and with all your soul, that not one thing which the Lord your God has promised you has not been fulfilled. And it shall be that as all the good things which the Lord your God has promised to you became true, so shall the Lord bring upon you all the evil things if you will transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you."

#### ISRAEL RENEWS THE COVENANT

AND JOSHUA gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called the elders of Israel and they presented themselves before God. Then Joshua said to the people:

"When you crossed the Jordan and you came to Jericho the men of Jericho fought against you and seven other na-

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children or grandchildren. But Deuteronomy tells us: "Not only with you do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him who stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with

וַחֲזָקְתֶּם מְאֹד לְשָׁמֵר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַכָּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה, לְבִלְתִּי סוּר מִמֶּנּוּ יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל.

tions, and I delivered them into your hand. I sent before you the hornet which drove them out—it was not with your own sword and bow. And I gave you a land for which you have not toiled and cities which you have not built, and you dwell within and you eat of vineyards and olive groves and orchards you did not plant. So fear the Lord and serve Him with sincerity and truth. Now if you do not want to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now dwell. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

And the people answered and said: “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for the Lord is our God.”

And Joshua said to the people: “It is not easy to serve the Lord, because He is a holy God and a demanding God. If after you take upon yourself to serve the Lord and then you forsake the Lord and serve other gods, He will turn and do you evil, after having done you good.”

And the people answered Joshua: “No, we will serve the Lord.”

Then Joshua said to the people: “You are witnesses against yourself that you have chosen to serve the Lord.”

And they said: “We are witnesses.”

And Joshua made a covenant with the people on that day. He interpreted for them the statutes and the ordinances and wrote all these words in the book of the Torah of God. [3] Then he took a great stone and set it under an oak tree which was by the Sanctuary

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him who is not here with us this day” (29:13-14). So Exodus, like the Covenant, is not only part of the history of the Jewish people but part of the personal history of every Jew in every epoch.



[3] THE BOOK OF THE TORAH OF GOD: Rabbi Hananiah said that had Israel not sinned, the Lord would have given the people only the Five Books of Moses and the Book of Joshua. These would have sufficed to teach them His ways. But they rebelled and sinned again and again so the Lord, out of His compassion, sent them prophets, books and precepts to continue their instruction, to deepen their understanding, to mature them in the ways of God and of goodness.

וְאֶנֶכִּי וּבֵיתִי נִעְבָּד אֶת יְיָ.

of the Lord, and he said to the people: "This stone shall be a witness against you that you may not deny your God."

And Joshua sent the people away, each one to his inheritance.

#### THE DEATH OF JOSHUA

AFTER ALL these things, Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. And they buried him in the bor-

der of his inheritance, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash. [4] And Israel served the Lord all the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who lived after him.

And the bones of Joseph, which the Israelites brought out of Egypt, were buried in Shechem, in the field which Jacob bought for one hundred pieces of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

❧ [4] THE MOUNTAIN OF GAASH: When Canaan was divided among the Israelites, they busied themselves with their fields and vineyards. Prosperity made them wayward and forgetful. They soon forgot Joshua and what he had done for them, and when he died they neither eulogized nor mourned him with feeling. The Lord waxed angry and caused the mountain to quake as a sign of their waywardness and ingratitude. In Hebrew *Gaash* means to quake or tremble.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, וַיָּמָת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נוּן עֶבֶד יְיָ בֶּן מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים.



## 4. JUDGES [2-5]

### THE NEW GENERATION

JOSHUA, THE SON of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, and his generation died too. Another generation arose who knew nothing of the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel. And the

Lord left the Philistines and the other nations and did not drive them out [1] hastily, neither did He deliver them into the hands of Joshua. He left them to test Israel, that the generations to come would be counselled to learn war, which beforetime they did not know.

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[1] AND DID NOT DRIVE THEM OUT: The Lord permitted the Philistines and Canaanites and Israel's other enemies to remain in the land. And so generations of Israelites were forced to learn to wage war. The Rabbis considered the necessity to learn and to practice war to be a punishment. Even under the most compelling urgency, to make war was considered an affliction.

וַיָּקָם דּוֹר אַחֵר אַחֲרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ אֶת יְיָ וְגַם אֶת הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל.

They forsook the Lord, [2] the God of their fathers, and they followed other gods, the gods of the peoples around them. They worshiped them and so provoked the Lord. And the anger of the Lord blazed against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of their enemies, and they could no longer withstand their enemies.

They were in sore plight. Then the Lord had compassion [3] on the Israelites because of their groans under the

oppressors. He raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of their plunderers. When the Lord raised up a judge, He would be with the judge and save them out of the hands of their enemies all the days of the judge. But when the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than did their fathers. Again they followed other gods. They served them and bowed to them, and would not give up their practices and their stubborn ways.

🔥 [2] **THEY FORSOOK THE LORD:** After Joshua died the people forgot the word of the Lord and His commandments; instead each of them was concerned only about himself and his possessions. The common good and the common purpose were lost. None had time for or interest in the Covenant and the worship of God. And because they had in this way forsaken the Lord they were unable to resist their enemies.

🔥 [3] **THE LORD HAD COMPASSION:** A king settled his young bondsmen and bondswomen on a tract of his land. There he raised them as if they were his children. He had houses built for them, planted vines and trees for them, and fed them from his own table. But the children neglected the vines, broke the saplings and left their houses untended. Then the king grew angry and punished them. But he punished them with compassion because he said, "How can I punish them severely? They are only children!"

So it was with the Children of Israel. The Lord gave them fields for which they did not labor, cities which they did not build, vineyards and olive groves which they did not plant. When they strayed, He forgave them their sins as a father forgives his children. And from among them He raised eighteen judges to save Israel from its enemies.

וַיִּקֶּם יְיָ שׁוֹפְטִים וַיּוֹשִׁיעוּם מִיַּד שׁוֹסֵיָהֶם.

And the Lord's anger was hot against Israel, and He said: "Because this nation has violated My covenant which I made with their fathers, and they did not listen to My voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the peoples that Joshua left when he died."

#### THE JUDGE OTHNIEL

AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. They married their daughters and their own daughters they married to their sons, and they served their gods. They forgot the Lord their God, and they served the Baalim and the Asheroth. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram-naharaim. And the Israelites served him eight years.

And the Israelites cried to the Lord, and the Lord raised a deliverer for the Children of Israel, Othniel, the son of Kenaz. The spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel, and went to war, and the Lord delivered Cushan-rishathaim into his hand. And the land had peace for forty years.

#### THE JUDGE EHUD

AND OTHNIEL died, and the Israelites again did evil in eyes of the Lord. And the Lord made Eglon, king of Moab victorious over Israel. And the Israelites served Eglon for eighteen years.

And the Israelites cried to the Lord, and He raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a left-handed man.

And the Israelites sent tribute by him to Eglon, the king of Moab. And Ehud made for himself a two-edged sword, a cubit long, and girded it under his cloak upon his right thigh.

Now Eglon was a very fat man. After Ehud had finished delivering the tribute he sent away the people who carried the present. But he himself turned back from the quarries that were near Gilgal. And he said: "I have a secret message for you, O king."

And the king said: "Silence!"

And all his attendants went out. And Ehud approached him as he sat alone in the cool upper chamber, and said: "I have a message from God to you."

And Eglon arose from his seat, [4] and Ehud put out his left hand and

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🔗 [4] EGLON AROSE FROM HIS SEAT: Eglon, the king of Moab, was the great-great-grandfather of King David. And Ruth, Eglon's daughter, was David's great-grandmother. Why did Eglon, a tyrant, an idol

וַיִּזְעֲקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל יְיָ וַיִּקָּם יְיָ לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת אֱהוּד בֶּן גֵּרָא.



took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into Eglon's belly. Then Ehud went out to the porch and shut the doors of the upper chamber and locked them. When he had gone out the servants came. They saw that the doors of the upper chamber were locked, and they said: "He is relieving himself there." After waiting a long time, they took the key and opened the doors. And there was their master, fallen down dead.

While they were waiting Ehud escaped. He passed the quarries and came to Seirah. When he got there, he blew a *Shofar* throughout the hill country of

Ephraim. And the Israelites went down with him. He went before them and he said to them: "Follow after me, for the Lord has delivered your enemies, into your hand."

And they followed him down. They seized the fords of the Jordan and they would not allow anyone to cross. They were victorious over the Moabites. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. Afterward, the land was at peace for eighty years.

SHAMGAR, THE SON OF ANATH

AFTER HIM CAME Shamgar, [5] the son

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worshiper, the scourge of Israel, merit the honor of such offspring? The Rabbis reply that though Eglon was a sinner and was punished for his transgressions by the sword, he was also rewarded for his respect for the Lord. For when Ehud said to him, "I have a message from God to you," Eglon rose from his throne in conscious awe of God's name. Then the Lord declared that because Eglon had risen in reverence for His throne, so would one of Eglon's descendants eventually sit on the throne of Israel.

🌀 [5] SHAMGAR: Shamgar was working in the fields when a band of Philistines raided his village. Though he had no weapon Shamgar seized an ox-goad and ran to fight them. Only a man of immense strength could wield such a heavy weapon—an ox-goad was eight to ten feet long with a spike at one end and a chisel-like blade at the other—but with it Shamgar stood against the Philistines. The villagers came to help him and six hundred Philistines perished in the battle. For his courage and simplicity, Shamgar remained in the peo-

וַתִּכְנַע מוֹאָב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא תַּחַת יַד יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַתִּשְׁקַט הָאָרֶץ שְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה.

of Anath, who slew six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad. And he also saved Israel.

DEBORAH AND BARAK

EHUD DIED, and the Israelites again did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and the Lord gave them over to the hand of

Jabin, the king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor. The captain of his army was Sisera. [6] The Israelites cried to the Lord, for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the Israelites mightily for twenty years.

Now Deborah, a prophetess, [7] the wife of Lappidoth, [8] judged Israel at that time. In the hill country of Ephraim

ple’s memory and was “written in the register of the House of Israel” (Ezekiel 13:9).

- 🔔 [6] SISERA: Sisera was one of the most ferocious and mighty warriors in history. When he hunted and cried aloud, animals were frozen in fear and could not move. All men feared him and bowed low before him. If they did not, he slew them unmercifully. And when people trembled and bowed before him, Sisera exulted: “Who is like me on the whole earth? Who, indeed, is like me in the heavens above?” Because he was a tyrant and a boaster, God had him brought low by a woman’s hand.
- 🔔 [7] THE PROPHETESS DEBORAH: The Rabbis asked: How is it that Deborah, a woman, became a prophet and a judge when Phinehas the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron still lived? Was not Phinehas’ lineage more illustrious? And the prophet Elijah answered them: “As heaven and earth are my witness, whether Jew or gentile, man or woman, maleservant or maidservant, the spirit of the Lord rests upon him who merits it according to his deeds.”
- 🔔 [8] THE WIFE OF LAPPIDOTH: The Rabbis note that Deborah’s husband is known by three names. At first he was called Michael. When Deborah went to the academies to search out those who would help her redeem the nation from Sisera, she saw Michael.

בֵּין גּוֹי וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל, בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין אִשָּׁה ... הַכֹּל לְפִי מַעֲשָׂיו רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שׁוֹרָה עָלָיו.

she sat under the palm tree of Deborah and the Israelites came up to her to be judged.

And she sent for Barak, the son of Abinoam, and said to him: "The Lord, the God of Israel commanded: 'Go toward Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. And I will draw Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army with his chariots and his army to the brook Kishon, and I will deliver him into your hand.'"

And Barak said to her: "If you will

come with me, [9] then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go myself."

And she said: "I will go with you, but the glory will not be yours; because they will say that the Lord delivered Sisera into the hand of a woman."

Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak summoned the men of Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. Ten thousand men came up to him.

They told Sisera that Barak had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera gathered together all his nine hundred iron char-

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He was a fine youth and a brilliant student. The Lord brought them together and they were married. And Deborah, who was very rich, helped to support the academies of study. She sent olive oil and thick wicks for their study lamps. Because it was her husband Michael who brought these gifts, his fellow students called him *Lappidoth*, the flame. But he was also called Barak, which means *lightning*, because his face shone bright as lightning when he served the Lord.

🕊 [9] IF YOU WILL COME WITH ME: Barak was a great and brave general. Yet he asked Deborah to go with him to meet Sisera in battle. Our Sages say that Barak did so because he knew the value of morale in the face of numbers. When the Israelites saw the mighty armies and chariots of Sisera and the thirty-one kings with him, they were afraid and ready to take flight. But when they saw the prophetess their spirits lifted. Deborah encouraged them, saying, "Fear not. The Lord goes before you. Take courage. You will defeat your enemies." And the Children of Israel took heart and attacked and defeated Sisera.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ בָּרַק: אִם תֵּלְכִי עִמִּי וְהִלַּכְתִּי, וְאִם לֹא תֵלְכִי עִמִּי לֹא אֵלֶיךָ.

lots and all of the people who were with him.

Then Deborah said to Barak: "Up! This is the day on which the Lord is to deliver Sisera to your hand."

Barak went down from Mount Tabor with the ten thousand men after him. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his men before Barak. And Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and Sisera's army. The whole army of Sisera fell before the sword.

Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him: "Turn, my lord, turn to me. Have no fear." And he turned into her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. And he said to her: "Give me, please, a little water. [10] I am thirsty." So she opened the goat-skin and gave him milk to drink, and covered him. Then he said

to her: "Stand at the door of the tent, and if anyone asks you, 'Is there a man here?' You shall say, 'No.'"

And he fell into a deep sleep because he was weary. So Jael took a tent-pin and a hammer in her hand, and went up softly to him, and she drove the pin into his temple, and it pierced through into the ground, and he died.

And Barak pursued Sisera, and Jael came out to meet him, and said: "Come and I will show you the man you are looking for." Barak went inside and saw Sisera lying dead.

#### THE SONG OF DEBORAH

THEN SANG Deborah and Barak on that day, saying:

"Hear, O kings, give ear, O princes:  
To the Lord will I sing;  
I will praise the Lord, the God of  
Israel.

☞ [10] A LITTLE WATER: How did Jael, a woman and the wife of a humble Kenite, find the strength to kill the mighty Sisera? Jael gave Sisera milk instead of water to see if his head was clear. When Sisera did not know the difference, Jael understood that he was confused, and knew she could go ahead to kill him. As he slept, the Rabbis tell us, Jael thought of how many women Sisera had widowed, how many children he had orphaned, how many husbands he had killed leaving their tents empty. And she knew he would do more killing if he lived. And then, not with a sword, but with the homely instruments of the tent dweller she slew him.

שָׁמְעוּ מְלָכִים, הֶאֱזִינוּ רוֹזְנִים: אֲנֹכִי לִי, אֲנֹכִי אֲשִׁירָה, אֹמֵר לִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Lord, when Thou didst go out of  
 Seir,  
 When Thou didst march out of  
 the field of Edom,  
 The earth trembled, the heavens  
 also shook;  
 The clouds, too, dropped water.  
 The mountains quaked at the  
 presence of the Lord,  
 Like Sinai, at the presence of the  
 Lord, the God of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar, the son  
 of Anath, the caravans  
 disappeared,  
 The travelers kept to the byways.  
 There were no open cities in  
 Israel, they disappeared,  
 Until I arose, Deborah,  
 Until I arose, a mother in Israel.  
 Then was there war at the gates.

Awake, awake, Deborah!  
Awake, awake, strike up a song!  
 Arise, Barak,  
 Take your captives, you son of  
 Abinoam!

The kings came, they fought.  
 Then fought the kings of Canaan.  
 At Taanach, by the waters of  
 Megiddo;  
 They did not take booty of silver.  
 The stars fought from heaven,

From their courses they fought  
 Sisera.

The brook Kishon swept them  
 away,  
 That ancient brook Kishon.  
 Tread on them, O my soul, in  
 strength!

O how the hoofs of the horses  
 stamped,  
 From the prancings,  
 The prancings of their mighty  
 ones.  
 Cursed be Meroz, said the angel  
 of the Lord.  
 Curse, curse its inhabitants,  
 Because they did not come to the  
 help of the Lord,  
 To help the Lord with the heroes.

Blessed above women shall Jael be,  
 The wife of Heber, the Kenite;  
 Blessed above the women in the  
 tents.

Water he asked: milk she gave  
 him.

In a lordly bowl she brought his  
 curd.

Her hand she put to the tent-pin.  
 And her right hand to the  
 workmen's hammer.

She hammered Sisera, she smote  
 his head,  
 She pierced through his temples.

עוֹרִי, עוֹרִי, דְּבוֹרָה! עוֹרִי, עוֹרִי, דְּבָרִי שִׁיר!

At her feet he sank, he fell,  
 he lay.  
 He sank, he fell at her feet.  
 Where he sank, there he fell  
 down dead.

Through the window peered the  
 mother of Sisera,  
 Through the lattice, she looked  
 and lamented:  
 'Why is his chariot so long in  
 coming?  
 Why is the clatter of his  
 chariots so late?'  
 The wisest of her princesses [11]  
 answer her,

Why, she answers herself:  
 'Will they not find and divide  
 booty?  
 A maid, two maids for every  
 man.  
 To Sisera a spoil of dyed  
 garments,  
 One dyed robe, two dyed  
 embroidered cloths  
 For the neck of every spoiler?'

Thus perish all Thy enemies,  
O Lord!  
But those who love Him,  
May they be as the rising of the  
sun in his might!"

☞ [11] THE WISEST OF HER PRINCESSES: Why does Sisera's mother ask her women for counsel, then answer her own question? Our Sages remind us that Sisera's mother was anxious because Sisera had not yet returned from the battle. So she spoke to her wise woman, or diviner. In a vision the diviner saw two women—Deborah and Jael—and the color red—Sisera's blood. But the mother misinterprets the two women in the vision to be Sisera's captives and the scarlet color the dye of the garments he had taken as booty.

כִּן יֵאָבְדוּ כָּל אוֹיְבֵיךָ, יְיָ, וְאוֹהֲבֵי כְּצֵאת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּגִבּוֹרָתוֹ.



## 5. JUDGES [5-8]

### THE JUDGE GIDEON

THE LAND was at peace for forty years. Then the Israelites again did evil in the eyes of the Lord, [1] and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years. The hand of Midian lay

heavy upon Israel. The Israelites made hiding places in the mountains, [2] in the caves and in strongholds. For when the Israelites had sown, the Midianites, the Amalekites and the Kedemites came up and destroyed the produce of the earth, and did not leave sustenance for

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[1] EVIL IN THE EYES OF THE LORD: After the death of each Judge, it is written that the people “*again* did evil in the sight of the Lord.” But after the death of Deborah the word *again* is left out. The Midrash tells us that after Deborah sang her song of praise for the Lord, He forgave Israel all its previous transgressions. The Israelites then repented truly and prosperity returned to the land. But the people soon found a new and even more grievous sin, the sin of worshiping one’s own reflection.

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְיָ, וַיִּתֶּנָּם יְיָ בְּיַד מִדְיָן שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים.

Israel, not even for a sheep, an ox, or ass. They would come up with their cattle and their tents, swarming like locusts. Both they and their camels were numberless. And Israel was brought low and cried unto the Lord.

An angel of the Lord [3] came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah and belonged to Joash. And his son Gideon was threshing wheat [4] in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel said to him: "The Lord is with you, valiant warrior!"

And Gideon said to him: "Oh, my lord, if the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened to us? Where are all His wonderful deeds which our fathers told us about, saying: Did not the Lord bring us out of Egypt? But now the Lord has cast us off and delivered us into the hand of Midian."

And the Lord turned toward him and said: "Go, and with the strength you have shown you shall save Israel from the hand of Midian. For it is I who send you."

🌀 [2] HIDING PLACES IN THE MOUNTAINS: When the Midianites oppressed Israel, they seized everything in their path. When the enemy approached, the Israelites signaled from village to village. Then the people drove their sheep and cattle into caves, and hid their crops in pits, and fled into strongholds they had prepared in the hills for just such emergencies.

🌀 [3] AN ANGEL OF THE LORD: Why does God first send an angel to Gideon and then moments later speak to Gideon Himself? Man must be prepared for his vision of God, the Rabbis tell us. Gideon must know before Whom he stands. So was Moses prepared when he was confronted with the mystery of the burning bush.

🌀 [4] GIDEON WAS THRESHING WHEAT: High among Gideon's merits was that he was a devoted son. When his father was old and the time to thresh the wheat came, Gideon said, "I am young, father. If the Midianites should come upon me I shall be able to defend myself against them. Or if they are too many I shall be swift in my flight. But at your age, you can neither defend yourself strongly nor run swiftly enough to escape them. Therefore, let me be the one to do the threshing."

לֵךְ בְּכֹחֶךָ זֶה וְהוֹשַׁעְתָּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכַּף מִדְיָן, הֲלֹא שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ.



And Gideon said to Him: "Oh, my Lord, how can I save Israel, when my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house?"

The Lord answered him: "I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

And it was on the same night the angel of the Lord said to him: "Arise and destroy the altar of Baal that your father built and you shall cut down the Asherah beside it. Then build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this rock, and take your father's bullock [5] and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you cut down."

Then Gideon took ten of his servants, and did as the Lord had told him to do. But because he was afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, so he did it at night. When the men of the city rose in the morning, they saw that the altar of Baal was torn down and the Asherah around it was cut down, and the bullock

had been offered upon the altar which had been built. They said one to another: "Who has done this thing?" They searched and inquired and they found out that it was Gideon. Then the men of the city said to Joash: "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has torn down the altar of the Baal and cut down the Asherah."

And Joash said to those who stood against him: "Are you going to take the Baal's part? Do you intercede for him? If he is a god, let him contend for himself for his broken altar."

So on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, meaning: Let Baal contend against him, because he has overthrown his altar.

#### WAR WITH MIDIAN

THE MIDIANITES, the Amalekites and the Kedemites joined forces, and crossed the Jordan and encamped in the valley of Jezreel. And the spirit of the Lord

🕊 [5] TAKE YOUR FATHER'S BULLOCK: Rabbi Abba bar Kahana noted that the Lord allowed Gideon to commit many infractions of Jewish law in this sacrifice. He used the wood of a pagan idol, an Asherah. He used hewn stones to build the altar. He made his sacrifice at night rather than by day. He was not a priest yet he performed the sacrifice. And he performed the sacrifice on a "high place," which was specifically forbidden. But, Rabbi bar Kahana continues, because Israel was in such desperate need, the offering was accepted.

בִּי אֲדֹנָי, בְּמָה אוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל? הֲיֵנָה אֵלֶּפִי הַדֵּל בְּמִנְשָׁה וְאֲנֹכִי הַצָּעִיר בְּבֵית אָבִי.

rested upon Gideon and he blew the *Shofar*, and the men of Abiezer gathered around him. Then he sent messengers throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, and they came up to meet him and his men.

And Gideon said to God: "If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as Thou hast spoken, look, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor. If there will be dew only on the fleece and the ground will be dry, then I shall know Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as Thou hast spoken."

And it was so. He rose up early the next day and squeezed the fleece, and wrung dew from the fleece, a bowlful of water. And Gideon said to God: "Let not Thine anger be kindled against me, and I will speak but this time. Let me have proof, I pray Thee, this time with the fleece. Let the fleece only be dry, and let there be dew only upon all the ground."

And God did so that night. The fleece alone was dry, and there was dew on all the ground.

Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people who were with him, rose up early and encamped in En-harod, and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh.

And the Lord said to Gideon: "The people who are with you are too many for Me to deliver the Midianites in their hands. Israel might give itself greater glory than Me and say: 'My own power has saved me.' Therefore, proclaim to the people: Whosoever is fearful and trembling should arise early and depart from Mount Gilead." [6] And twenty-two thousand of the people went home, and there remained ten thousand.

And the Lord said to Gideon: "There are still too many people. Bring them down to the water and there I will select them for you." And Gideon brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon: "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, place him to one side. And every one who kneels down to drink [7] on

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🔗 [6] DEPART FROM MOUNT GILEAD: Here Gideon speaks according to the Torah. "If there is a man who is fearful and fainthearted, let him return to his house, lest his brethren's heart melt as does his" (Deuteronomy 20:8). And the Lord told Gideon to send them home early in the morning before the camp was awake so that those who remained would not jeer at those who departed.

מִי יֵרָא וְחָרַד יָשׁוּב וַיִּצְפֹּר מֵהָר הַגִּלְעָד.

the other." There were three hundred men who lapped with their tongues, drawing their hands to their mouths. But all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. And the Lord said to Gideon: "With the three hundred men [8] who lapped will I save you and deliver the Midianites into your hands. All the rest of the people shall go home." And Gideon sent all the men of Israel home, but kept only the three hundred.

#### THE DREAM

THE CAMP OF Midian lay below him in the valley. On that same night the Lord

said to him: "Go down into the Midianite camp, you and your servant Purah, and you shall hear their talk. Then you will have the courage to attack the camp."

Gideon and his servant Purah went down to the outpost of the armed men who were lying along the valley like a swarm of locusts. Their camels could not be counted, like the sand which is at the seashore. When Gideon arrived there, he heard a man telling a dream to his fellow. He said: "I dreamt that a cake of barley bread [9] tumbled into the camp of Midian. When it reached a tent, it struck so hard that it fell and turned it upside down and it lay flat."

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- 🔪 [7] EVERY ONE WHO KNEELS DOWN TO DRINK: First, Gideon eliminates those who are fearful and afraid. Then he eliminates those who worshiped their reflections in the water. Those who knelt Gideon knew to be reflection worshipers and he sent them away. And so Gideon was left with the righteous and the pious. With those remaining three hundred, the Lord would save Israel.
- 🔪 [8] WITH THE THREE HUNDRED MEN: The Rabbis understood this to mean that God intended that the warrior should not become a hero and an example to Jews. Those who have faith in the Lord will stand fast in His stead. The number of Gideon's host therefore mattered little.
- 🔪 [9] A CAKE OF BARLEY BREAD: The barley loaf is a circular flat cake baked on hot stones. It was the food of the humble and the poor. Eating the barley loaf showed in what dire straits the Israelites were

בְּשֵׁלֶשׁ מֵאוֹת הָאִישׁ הַמְּלָקִים אוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם וְנִתְּתִי אֶת מִדְיָן בְּיָדְךָ.

His fellow answered and said: "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon, and that God has delivered all Midian into his hand."

As soon as Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in prayer, and he then returned to his camp and said to his men: "Arise! The Lord has delivered into your hand the host of Midian."

Then Gideon divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he placed *Shofars* in the hands of all of them, and empty pitchers, and torches in the pitchers. And he said to them: "Watch me and do likewise. As I come to the outskirts of the camp, I will blow the *Shofar*. You too will blow your *Shofars* and cry out: 'For the Lord and Gideon.'"

And Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, and they blew the *Shofars* and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the *Shofars*, smashed the pitchers; held the torches in their

left hands and the *Shofars* to blow in their right hands, and they cried: "The sword for the Lord and Gideon!"

Every man stood in his place around the camp, and they blew the three hundred *Shofars*. And throughout the whole camp the Lord set the Midianites fighting one against another. The entire host fled as far as Tabbath. And the men of Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh gathered and pursued after Midian.

Gideon sent messengers through the hill country of Ephraim saying: "Come down against the Midianites, and seize the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the streams as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan. And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and killed both of them.

#### THE END OF THE WAR

AND THE MEN of Ephraim said to Gideon: "Why did you not call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they rebuked him sharply.

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because of their enemies. But the barley cake also was symbolic of the few in Israel who remained true to the simple strong traditions of the Hebrews. The tent is the symbol of the nomadic Midianite invaders. The dream prophesied truly that the barley loaf of Israel would overthrow the tents of Midian.

קומו! כי נתן יי בידכם את מחנה מדן.

And he answered them: "What have I done in comparison with you? The gleaning of Ephraim [10] is better than the vintage of Abiezer. God has delivered into your hand the two princes of Midian. What is my achievement compared to yours?" When they heard what he said their anger abated.

So Midian was subdued by Israel, and they never raised their head again. And the people of Israel said to Gideon: "Rule over us, you, then your son and

also your grandson, for you saved us from the hand of Midian." And Gideon said to them: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you!"

Gideon returned home, and he had seventy sons, for he had many wives. His concubine in Shechem bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. And Gideon died at a good old age and was buried in Ophrah. The country was at peace for forty years.

- ❧ [10] THE GLEANING OF EPHRAIM: The figure of speech means that "the weakest of the Ephraimites is better than the strongest of the Abiezerites." The tribe of Ephraim had grown angry and its leaders thought they had been ignored by Gideon, who came from a poor family of the tribe of Manasseh. To avoid further dispute, Gideon placated the anger of the Ephraimites by magnifying their achievement in war and speaking of his own part as insignificant. Gideon knew that "A soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1) and he wanted to avoid the war of brother against brother.

לֹא אֶמְשַׁל אֲנִי בָכֶם וְלֹא יֶמְשַׁל בְּנִי בָכֶם. יְיָ יֶמְשַׁל בָּכֶם.



## 6. JUDGES [8-10]

### ABIMELECH

AND IT WAS as soon as Gideon died  
that the Israelites again went astray  
after the Baalim, and they made Baal-  
berith their god. The Israelites forgot  
the Lord their God who had delivered  
them out of the hand of their enemies.  
Neither were they kind [1] to the fam-

ily of Jerubbaal, in return for all the  
good he had rendered to Israel.

Then Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal,  
went to Shechem, to his mother's kins-  
men, and he spoke to his mother's  
whole family: "Speak, please, to the  
men of Shechem: 'Which is better for  
you, to have seventy men rule over you,  
all the sons of Jerubbaal, or to have one

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[1] NEITHER WERE THEY KIND: Why are ingratitude and idolatry spoken of together as if they were the same sin? Because ingratitude and idolatry go together; and only faith in God is proof against both. The Rabbis tell us that Israel's ingratitude to the house of Gideon was like ingratitude to the Lord. This the Israelites did when they

וַיְהִי כִּפְאֶשֶׁר מֵת גִּדְעֹן וַיָּשׁוּבוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּזְנוּ אַחֲרֵי הַבָּעָלִים.

man rule over you?' And also, remember, that I am your bone and flesh."

And his mother's kinsmen spoke of him to all the men of Shechem, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, because they said: "He is our brother." So they gave him seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-berith. With them Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men who followed him. He went to his father's house in Ophrah, and slew his brothers,

the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy of them, upon one stone. Only Jotham, the youngest of Jerubbaal, escaped, because he hid himself.

Then all the people of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together and made Abimelech [2] king by the oak of the pillar that was by Shechem.

#### JOTHAM'S PARABLE

WHEN JOTHAM was told of this, he

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permitted Abimelech to murder the children of their benefactor Gideon. They refused to remember all Gideon had done in their behalf. To fail to show gratitude to Gideon, therefore, was to deny their history. Our Sages understood this to mean that the Israelites had forgotten what the Lord had done in their behalf in the past ever since He had led them out of Egypt. Ingratitude was thereby idolatry and the Israelites had thus forsaken the ways of the Lord.

- 🔗 [2] ABIMELECH: Abimelech was one of the judges who helped to save Israel. In the three years he ruled, Israel was not oppressed by its enemies. As the son of Gideon, Abimelech had the right to rule and might have ruled for a long time, even established a dynasty, had he not been evil and greedy. He murdered his brothers and unjustly took money from the people. For this he came to an untimely and ignoble death, and was unworthy of being a judge. He was allowed to rule for three years because of the merit of his father, Gideon, who was modest, humble and honest, and when the Israelites offered him the crown, he refused it, saying: "*I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you.*" Because of this the Lord said: "I do swear that one of your sons will rule for at least three years."

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל בְּעָלֵי שָׁכָם וְכָל בֵּית-מִלּוֹא וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיִּמְלִיכוּ אֶת אֲבִימֶלֶךְ לְמֶלֶךְ.

went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifting up his voice he called out: "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, so that God may listen to you. The trees once set out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree: 'Reign over us!' But the olive tree said: 'Should I leave my rich soil with which they honor God and men, to hold sway over the trees?'"

"So the trees said to the fig tree: 'Come, rule over us!' But the fig tree said: 'Should I leave my sweetness and good fruit to hold sway over the trees?'"

"Then the trees said to the vine: 'Come and reign over us!' But the vine said: 'Should I leave my wine which cheers God and men, to hold sway over the trees?'"

"Then the trees said to the bramble: 'Come, rule over us!' And the bramble said to the trees: 'If in truth you anoint me king over you, come and take shelter in my shade. But if not, let fire come out of the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'"

"Now," continued Jotham, "my father fought for you, risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian, and you have risen up against my father's family and have slain his sons, seventy upon one stone. Then you made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over you. Now, if you did this thing because he is your kinsman and

in good faith, then rejoice in Abimelech and let him rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth-millo, and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and Beth-millo and devour Abimelech."

Jotham ran away, and fled to Beer in fear of his brother Abimelech.

#### WAR BETWEEN SHECHEM AND ABIMELECH

ABIMELECH RULED over Israel three years. God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem revolted against Abimelech, so that the murder of the seventy sons of Gideon might be laid upon Abimelech, who had killed them, and also upon the men of Shechem who aided him in killing his brothers. And Gaal, the son of Ebed, came with his kinsmen to Shechem. The men of Shechem put their trust in him. They went out to the field and gathered their vineyards and trod their grapes and they made joyful feasts. They went into the temple of their god and ate and drank and they cursed Abimelech. And Gaal said to them: "Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?"

When Zebul, the governor of the city, heard what Gaal said, he sent messengers to Abimelech and told him: "Let

אִם בְּאַמֶּת אַתֶּם מוֹשְׁחִים אוֹתִי לְמֶלֶךְ עֲלֵיכֶם, בּוֹאוּ חֲסוּ בְּצִלִּי; וְאִם אֵין, תֵּצֵא  
אֵשׁ מִן הָאֶטֶד וְתֹאכַל אֶת אֶרְצִי הַלְבָּנוֹן.



Abimelech gather all his troops and come out to fight."

So Abimelech and all the people with him rose up by night, and lay in wait in four companies. In the morning, Gaal stood at the city gates, and Abimelech and the people with him rose from the lying in wait. When Gaal saw it, he said to Zebul: "Look, there are people coming down from the tops of the mountains." Zebul answered him: "You see the shadows of the mountains as though they were men." And Gaal said again, "But look, there are people coming down from the highest mountain, and another company is coming by way of Elon-meonenim." Then Zebul said: "Where is your mouth now, that you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Go out now and fight with him." And Gaal led the men of Shechem and fought against Abimelech. Abimelech defeated Gaal and he fled Shechem before him and many fell slain. And the next day Abimelech fought against the city and captured it. He razed all of the city and sowed it with salt.

#### THE TOWER OF SHECHEM

WHEN ALL THE men of the Tower of Shechem heard of this, they barricaded themselves in the fortress of the temple of El-berith. So Abimelech and his peo-

ple went up to Mount Zalmon, and he took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from a tree, and put it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who were with him: "Hurry and do just as you saw me do." So all the people likewise cut down branches and followed Abimelech. They put the branches around the tower and set it on fire, and all the people of the Tower of Shechem perished.

#### THE DEATH OF ABIMELECH

THEN ABIMELECH went to Thebez, besieged it and captured it. There was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women fled into it. Abimelech came to the tower to attack it. As he reached the doorway of the tower in order to burn it, a woman threw an upper millstone [3] at Abimelech's head and split his skull. Abimelech called hastily to the young man who bore his arms and said to him: "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, a woman killed him." His young man stabbed him and he died.

When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they went each to his home. Thus God requited the wickedness of Abimelech which he had done to his father, killing his seventy brothers. Also the wickedness of the men of Shechem did God requite upon

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו זְבוּל: אֶת צֵל הַהָרִים אַתָּה רוֹאֶה כְּאֲנָשִׁים.

their heads so that the curse of Jotham descended upon them.

#### THE ISRAELITES IN DISTRESS

THE ISRAELITES again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They served the Baalim, the Ashtarothe and other strange gods. They forsook the Lord and did not serve Him. And the anger of God was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who oppressed the Israelites for eighteen years. The Israelites cried to the Lord, saying: "We have sinned against Thee, for we have forsaken our God and served the Baalim."

And the Lord said to the Israelites: "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and the Philistines? And

when the nations oppressed you, you cried to Me and I rescued you from their hand. And yet you forsook Me and served other gods, so I will save you no more. Go, wail to the gods whom you have chosen! Let them rescue you in the time of your trouble!"

And the Israelites said unto the Lord: "We have sinned. Do unto us as Thou dost desire, only rescue us, we pray, this time."

They put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord, so He would no longer bear the misery of Israel.

Then the Ammonites gathered together and camped in Gilead and the Israelites in Mizpah. Now the princes of Gilead said one to another: "The man who will lead us in the war against the Ammonites shall be the head of all the inhabitants of Gilead."

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☞ [3] AN UPPER MILLSTONE: Abimelech was punished "measure for measure." Because he had killed his brothers, seventy of them on one stone, so too was he killed by a single stone. Because he was a fierce and bloodthirsty warrior, the unworthy son of a judge, so was he brought low by an ordinary woman's hand and her common household millstone. Because he was a conqueror of great cities, so was he finally defeated by a small town.

מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַחֲלֶה לְהִלָּחֵם בְּבִנְיָ עַמּוֹן יִהְיֶה לְרֹאשׁ לְכָל יוֹשְׁבֵי גִלְעָד.



## 7. JUDGES [11-12]

### JEPHTHAH

JEPHTHAH, THE Gileadite, was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a woman of a different tribe. Gilead was the father of Jephthah, but when his wife's

sons had grown up they said to Jephthah: "You shall not inherit anything in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." And Jephthah fled from his brothers, [1] and settled in the land of Tob. And there gathered

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[1] FLED FROM HIS BROTHERS: Jephthah's mother came from a different tribe than his father. In those days it was considered improper to marry out of one's tribe. Jephthah's father had taken his first wife from his own tribe. When the sons of the first wife grew up they drove Jephthah out, after his father had died, refusing to give him his part of the inheritance. This was contrary to the law of the Torah which decreed that a son is the legitimate heir whether his mother is from the same tribe or not. But the elders of Gilead did

לֹא תִנָּחַל בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ כִּי בֶן אִשָּׁה אַחֶרֶת אָתָּה.

around him dispossessed men who followed him.

When the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Israel went into the land of Tob, and said to Jephthah: "Come, and be our chief, so that we may fight the Ammonites."

Jephthah said: "Did you not hate me [2] and drive me out of my father's house? Why then have you come to me now, when you are in trouble?"

The elders said to Jephthah: "[True, we have wronged you,] but now we turn to you, that you may be our leader, to come with us and fight against the Ammonites."

And Jephthah said: "If you bring me back home to fight against the Ammonites and the Lord does deliver them to me, I will remain your leader."

And the elders of Gilead said: "The Lord shall be witness between us, if we do not just as you say."

Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead and the people made him chief over them, and they made a vow before the Lord in Mizpah. Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of Ammon, saying: "As I have not sinned against you, you do me wrong to come to war against my land. Let the Lord be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon!"

But the king of the Ammonites would not listen to his words. Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, so he crossed to Gilead [and collected troops], and he came to Mizpah. He made a vow to the Lord, saying: "If You will indeed deliver the Ammonites into my

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not right the wrong done to Jephthah. Thus, when war broke out and they came to seek his help, Jephthah refused them because of the wrong done him. But when the people chose him to be chief over them, Jephthah relented.

❧ [2] DID YOU NOT HATE ME?: Why did Jephthah rebuff the elders who came to ask him to be their leader? Rabbi Jonah of Gerona explains that if a man wrongs his fellow man and then, when he is in trouble, comes and apologizes, humbles himself because he needs the man he has wronged, then the wronged man will find that an even greater insult and more painful wrong has been done him than before. As Jephthah said, "Why did you come to me when you are in distress?"

הֲלֹא אַתֶּם שִׁנְאַתֶּם אוֹתִי וַתִּגְרְשׁוּנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי, וּמִדּוּעַ בָּאתֶם אֵלַי עַתָּה כְּאִשֶּׁר צָר לָכֶם?

hand, [3] then whatsoever comes from the doors of my house to meet me shall be the Lord's." [4]

And Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hand. Thus were the Ammonites subdued by the Israelites.

#### JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

THEN JEPHTHAH went home to Mizpah, and his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances. She was

his only child. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried out: "Alas, my daughter, you have struck me down and brought calamity upon me! For I made a vow to the Lord."

And she said: "My father, do to me according to that which has come out of your mouth, since the Lord has given you vengeance on your enemies. But, let me wander [5] for two months upon the mountains and bewail my maidenhood, I and my companions."

And he said: "Go!" And he sent her away for two months. And she and her

❧ [3] JEPHTHAH'S VOW: The Rabbis declare that the Lord neither wished Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, nor Jephthah to sacrifice his daughter. The Lord does not need or want human sacrifices. Because Jephthah's vow was so rash, calamity befell him. Even more repugnant than his vow was his willingness to sacrifice his daughter. The Rabbis protested that Jephthah's vow and sacrifice were against the teaching of the Torah. Jephthah's actions are the result of overzealousness and stubborn pride.

❧ [4] SHALL BE THE LORD'S: Which is more important, the Rabbis asked, a good heart or knowledge of the Torah? And they answered that even if a man try to be righteous, if he is not learned in the Torah, he may actually destroy life. Though Jephthah was full of zeal for the Lord, he had been an outcast and he did not know the Torah and the story of Abraham and Isaac.

❧ [5] LET ME WANDER: Jephthah's daughter tried to reason with her father. She said: "It is written in the Torah that if a man wishes to

אָבִי, עֲשֵׂה לִי כְּאֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִפִּי, אַחֲרֵי אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ יְיָ נִקְמוֹת מֵאוֹיְבָיךָ, מִבְּנֵי  
עַמּוֹן.

companions went to bewail her maidenhood on the mountains. Then she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. [6] She never married.

And it became a custom in Israel for the maidens of Israel to lament the daughter of Jephthah for four days in the year. [7]

#### CIVIL WAR

THE MEN OF Ephraim gathered together, went northward, and said to Jephthah: "Why did you go to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you."

make a sacrifice, then he should take from his herds or flocks."

Jephthah answered, "My daughter, I did swear!"

"Remember Jacob," she said. "He promised to give the Lord a tenth of all he should gain. He had twelve sons but did not attempt to sacrifice one of them." But Jephthah would not heed her.

The *Zayit Raanan* declares: No Sanhedrin would have allowed Jephthah's vow to stand. What if his whole family had come forth to greet him? Would he have sacrificed them all, mother and child, servants and relatives?

🔥 [6] AS HE HAD VOWED: The Midrash tells us that Phinehas, the High Priest, could have absolved Jephthah from his oath so that Jephthah's daughter would go free. But both men stood on their pride. Jephthah said, "I am a judge and a general. I have saved Israel. Let Phinehas come before me." And Phinehas said, "I am the High Priest, the son of the High Priest. This man is a common upstart. Let him come before me." And so between their two prides the maiden perished.

🔥 [7] FOUR DAYS IN THE YEAR: Some of our Sages say that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter but only sent her into seclusion. She was kept from a normal woman's life and devoted to the service of the Lord. And, therefore, every year the daughters of Israel came for four days to comfort her.

וַתְּהִי חֹק בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: מִיָּמִים יְמִימָה תִּלְכְּנָה בָנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְתִנּוֹת לְבַת יִפְתָּח  
הַגִּלְעָדִי אַרְבַּעַת יָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה.

Jephthah said: "I and my people were in a great war with the Ammonites. I called on you, but you did not come [8] to help me. When I saw that you did not come, I risked my life and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the Lord delivered them in my hand. Why then do you come to make war against me?"

The Ephraimites answered: "You Gileadites are no more than the deserters of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh."

And Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with

Ephraim and defeated them. Then the Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan. When any of the fugitive of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the Gileadites said to him: "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," they said to him: "Say now 'Shibboleth.'" He would say "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan.

Jephthah judged Israel for six years. He died, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

❧ [8] YOU DID NOT COME: The same pride and stubbornness Phinehas and Jephthah showed in dealing with Jephthah's vow to sacrifice his daughter, they both displayed in dealing with Ephraim. When the Ephraimites threatened to burn Jephthah's house down over his head, Phinehas, the High Priest, should have rebuked the proud Ephraimites and said, "You did not intercede in behalf of Jephthah's daughter, but you are ready to go to war for an imagined affront."

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ: אֶמְרָנָא שְׂבֻלֶת. וַיֹּאמֶר: סְבֻלֶת, וְלֹא יָכִין לְדַבֵּר בֵּן.



## 8. JUDGES [13-15]

### THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

AND THE ISRAELITES again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. And the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

And there was a man in Zorah, of the family of the tribe of Dan, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren and childless. And an angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her: "You are barren and childless; [1] but

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[1] YOU ARE BARREN AND CHILDLESS: Our Rabbis said that for the sake of peace, one may use a deceptive utterance. Thus, when the angel spoke to Zelalponit, he said to her: "You are barren and childless." But when he spoke to her husband the angel did not say that his wife was barren because this might destroy their domestic peace. Instead the angel told him, "Let the woman abstain from everything I said." That meant that though Manoah's wife had borne him no children she was not barren. There were means to cure her.

מִתֵּר לוֹ לְאָדָם לְשָׁנוֹת בְּדָבָר מִפְּנֵי הַשְּׁלוֹם.



you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore, be careful not to drink wine or any strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. When the son is born, no razor shall be used on his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from his birth. And he shall begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines."

Then the woman came to her husband and said to him: "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like an angel of the Lord, great and awful. I did not ask him where he came from, neither did he tell me his name."

Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, and said: "Hear me, O Lord, let the man of God whom Thou didst send come to us again, and teach us to what to do for the boy that shall be born."

And God heeded Manoah. And the angel of God came again to the woman

as she sat in the field. And she ran and told her husband that the man appeared to her again. And Manoah arose and went after his wife, and came to the man and said, "When your words are fulfilled, how shall we act toward the child?"

And the angel of the Lord said: "The woman must abstain from everything of which I spoke to her. She shall not drink any wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing."

And Manoah said: "Let us detain you, that we may prepare a lamb for you to eat."

And the angel said: "Though you detain me, I will not eat [2] of your food; and if you prepare a burnt-offering, you must offer it to the Lord!"

Manoah did not know that the man was an angel of the Lord, and he said:

🕒 [2] I WILL NOT EAT: When the angels appear to Abraham to announce the birth of Isaac, they accept the food which Abraham himself set before them. The Rabbis said that this was because Abraham's hospitality was being put to the test. The angels appear to him as wayfarers and impart their message to him only after he has proved his welcome. The angel Pahadiel who appears to Manoah was immediately recognized as divine and had no need to accept food. Moreover, if the angel should now accept food, it would seem to be in compensation for the prophecy which he had brought to Manoah and therefore he declines. A prophet is not to be paid for his prophecy.

כִּי נִזִּיר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי הַנֶּעַר מִן הַבָּטָן, וְהוּא יִחַל לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד פְּלִשְׁתִּים.

“What is your name, so that we may honor you when your words are fulfilled?”

And the angel said: “Why do you ask my name? For it is hidden.” [3]

So Manoah took the lamb and the meal-offering, and offered them upon the rock to the Lord. Then flame came out of the rock, and the flame went up toward heaven, and the angel ascended in the flame.

When Manoah and his wife saw it, they fell upon their faces to the ground. And Manoah said to his wife: “We will surely die because we have seen God.”

But his wife said: “If the Lord meant to kill us, He would not have told us such things as these.”

And the woman gave birth to a son and called him Samson. The boy grew and the Lord blessed him. And the spirit of the Lord [4] began to move him, between Zorah and Eshtaol.


SAMSON WEDS A PHILISTINE  
WOMAN


AND SAMSON went down to Timnah and there he saw a woman, a daughter of the Philistines. He came back and said to his father and mother: “I have seen a woman in Timnah, a Philistine. Now, get her for me as a wife.”

And his father and mother said: “Is there no woman among the daughters of our kinsmen, or among all our people, that you must take a wife from the Philistines?”

And Samson said to his father: “Get her for me, for she is the one that pleases me.” And his father and mother did not know that it was at the instigation of the Lord that Samson should have occasion to quarrel [5] with the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

Then Samson and his father and

 [3] FOR IT IS HIDDEN: The angel said to Manoah: My name is without meaning to you. The Lord’s messengers are embodied in different forms, as wind or fire, or any living thing according to the Lord’s desire and as the occasion requires.

 [4] THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD: When the spirit of the Lord filled Samson, he ran so fast that his hair sang in the wind and could be heard from a great distance. It was then too that Samson uprooted the mountains between Zorah and Eshtaol and ground them to

וַתְּחַל רוּחַ יְיָ לְפַעֲמוֹ בְּמַחְנֶה דָּן, בֵּין צֶרְעָה וּבֵין אֶשְׁתָּאוֹל.

mother went down to Timnah. As they came to the vineyards there, a young lion came roaring toward him. And the spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and he tore the lion as one would have torn a lamb. He had nothing in his hand, and he did not tell [6] his father and mother what he had done. And he went down and talked with the woman, and she pleased Samson well.

After a while, Samson returned with his father and mother to marry and turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. There was a swarm of bees and honey inside the body of the lion. So he scraped it out in his hand, and ate it as he went. He went to his father and mother and he gave them some to eat, but he did not tell them whence it came.

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powder one against the other. And, the Rabbis tell us, lest you wonder at such feats, remember that the width of Samson's shoulders was the width of the gates of Gaza. When the Lord was with him, Samson's strength was beyond compare.

🕍 [5] OCCASION TO QUARREL: In Samson's time the Israelites were not strong enough to make war against the Philistines. Samson therefore sought an occasion to attack them for a personal affront but not as a representative of Israel. He did that so that when he afflicted the Philistines, he would not bring reprisals down on the heads of his people. In that way Samson protected Israel in his generation.

🕍 [6] HE DID NOT TELL: How can Samson be accompanied by his parents without their knowing that he slew the lion? Samson and his parents walked together until they came to the vineyards of Timnah. Manoah and his wife wanted to take the shortest route through the vineyards but Samson would not. He was a Nazirite and therefore expressly forbidden in the vineyards. The Nazirite is cautioned: "Keep away, go round about, approach not the vineyard" (Y'vamot 46a), and also, "Take a circuitous route, O Nazirite, but do not approach the vineyard" (Shabbat 13a). Therefore Samson walked around the vineyards and was then confronted by the lion while his parents went directly through the vineyards.

וַתֵּצֵחַ עָלָיו רוּחַ יְיָ וַיִּשְׁפָּעֵהוּ כְּשֵׁפַע הַגִּדִי, וּמָאוּמָה אֵין בְּיָדוֹ.

And Samson made a feast, for so the bridegrooms used to do. And the bride's family brought thirty companions to be with him. And Samson said: "Let me now ask you a riddle. If you will tell me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen robes and thirty festal garments, but if you are unable to tell me the solution, then you must give me thirty linen robes and thirty festal garments."

And they said: "Propose your riddle so we may hear it."

And he said: "Out of the eater came forth food; out of the strong came forth sweetness."

They could not solve the riddle in three days. They said to Samson's wife: "Persuade your husband to tell you the meaning of the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Did you invite us here to impoverish us altogether?"

And Samson's wife wept before him, and said: "You do not love me at all. You proposed a riddle to my people, and you did not tell me the solution."

And he said: "I have not told my father and mother; shall I tell you?"

And she wept before him the remainder of the seven days of the feast. On the seventh day because she pressed him hard he told it to her. And she told the riddle to her people. And on the seventh day, before the sun went down,

the men of the city said to him: "What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?"

And he answered them: "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle."

And the spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he went to Ashkelon and smote thirty of the Philistines; and he took their garments and gave the garments to those who solved the riddle. Then he went up to his father's house in great anger. And Samson's wife was given to one of his companions.

#### SAMSON TAKES REVENGE

AT THE TIME of the wheat harvest Samson went to visit his wife, with a present, a kid. And he said: "I want to go in to my wife, in her chamber." But her father would not let him go in. Her father said: "I thought you hated her, so I gave her to one of your companions. Now, is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Take her instead."

And Samson said: "This time will I surely be innocent of sin if I do harm to the Philistines." And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes. And he tied them tail to tail and he put torches between each two tails. Then he set the torches on fire, and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. It burnt up both the shocks

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם: מִהָאוֹכֵל יֵצֵא מֵאֲכָל, וּמֵעֵז יֵצֵא מִתּוֹק.

and the standing grain, and also the oliveyards.

The Philistines asked: "Who has done this?" And they said: "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." And the Philistines came and burnt her and the house of her father.

And Samson said to them: "If this is the manner in which you act, I will take my revenge on you." He smote them hip and thigh with great slaughter, and he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and they spread themselves around Lehi. And the men of Judah said: "Why have you come against us?" And they said: "To bind Samson, to do to him as he has done to us."

Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock, and they said to Samson: "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?

What have you done unto us?" And he said: "As they did to me, so I have done to them."

And they said to him: "We have come down to bind you, to deliver you into the hand of the Philistines."

And Samson said: "Swear to me that you yourselves will not assail me. And they said to him: "We will only bind you fast, and deliver you into their hand." And they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock.

When they brought him to Lehi, the Philistines shouted. And the spirit of the Lord came upon him, and the ropes upon his arms became as flax that has caught fire; and his bonds melted from his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of an ass. He took it and felled a thousand men. Then Samson said:

"With the jawbone of an ass, heaps  
upon heaps,  
With the jawbone of an ass I  
have felled a thousand men."

בְּלָחֵי הַתְּמּוֹר, תְּמּוֹר תְּמּוֹרָתָיִם, בְּלָחֵי הַתְּמּוֹר הַכִּיתִי אֶלֶף אִישׁ.



## 9. JUDGES [16]

### THE GATES OF GAZA

AND SAMSON went to Gaza and saw there a woman, an innkeeper, and he went to her. And it was told to the Gazites: "Samson has come here." They lay in wait for him at the gate of the city, and they whispered to each other. "We will wait till the morning light. Then we will kill him."

And Samson lay till midnight. Then he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts;

pulled them up, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the mountain that faces Hebron.

### SAMSON AND DELILAH

AND IT WAS after this that he loved a woman of the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came and said to her: "Entice him and find out wherein his great strength [1] lies, and how we can over-

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[1] HIS GREAT STRENGTH: If Samson's great strength came from the Lord, why did he fall prey to Delilah? Samson had used Philistine

וַיִּסְעֵם עִם הַבְּרִיחַ וַיִּשֶׂם עַל כַּתְּפָיו, וַיַּעֲלֵם אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי חֶבְרוֹן.

power him, bind him and subdue him. We will give you, every one of us, eleven hundred pieces of silver."

And Delilah said to Samson: "Tell me wherein lies your great strength, and with what can you be bound to subdue you?"

And Samson answered: "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that were not dried, then I shall become weak and be as any other man."

And the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. And she had men lying in wait in the chamber. And she said: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he broke the bowstrings as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So the source of his strength was not discovered.

And Delilah said: "You have mocked me and told me lies. Now do tell me with what can you be bound?" And he said: "If you bind me with new ropes with which no work has been done,

then I shall become weak like any other man." And Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them. The men were lying in wait in the next chamber. And she said to Samson: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he broke the new ropes off his arms like thread.

And Delilah said to Samson: "Up till now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me with what you can be bound?" And he said: "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web and you fasten it with the pin." So when he was asleep she wove the seven locks of his head into the web and fastened it with the pin, and she said: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke out of his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.

And she said: "How can you say that you love me when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me three times and you did not tell me wherein lies your great strength."

She pressed him daily with her words

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women as the pretext to attack the Philistines, but his passions blinded him to his purpose. He let his passion for Delilah cause him to betray his trust as a judge and as a Nazirite. Because of that Delilah was able to bind him and betray him to his enemies. As Samson had used the Philistine women as a trap, now he was in turn trapped by a Philistine woman.

וַתֹּאמֶר דִּלְיָלָה אֶל שָׁמְשׁוֹן: הַגִּידָה-נָא לִי בִמָּה כֹחֶךָ גָּדוֹל וּבִמָּה תֵאָסֵר  
לְעֻנּוֹתֶךָ?

and urged him, until he was wearied to death. He told her his heart and said to her: "A razor has never been used upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my birth. If I were to be shaven, then my strength would go from me, and I would become weak, and be like any other man."

When Delilah saw that he had told her the truth, she called for the lords of the Philistines, saying: "Come up, this once, for he has told me the truth." [2] So the lords of Philistines came to her and brought the money in their hands.

Then Delilah made Samson sleep upon her knees, and she called for a man, and had the seven locks of his head shaven off and his strength left him. Then she said: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson." He awoke from his sleep and he said to himself, "I will go as I did before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord departed from him. Then the Philistines seized him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They

bound him with brass chains and made him grind corn in the prison house.

#### LET ME DIE WITH THE PHILISTINES

AND THE HAIR on Samson's head began to grow again. The lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their god, and rejoiced; for they said: "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hand."

And it was when the people became merry they said: "Call for Samson, that he may be a laughing stock for us." They called Samson out of the prison and he was a laughing stock for them. Then they put him between the pillars.

And Samson said to the lad who held his hand: "Let me feel the pillars on which the house is supported, that I may lean upon them." And the house was full of men and women, and the lords of Philistines were there. There were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, looking on while Samson was a laughing stock.

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🌀 [2] HE HAS TOLD ME THE TRUTH: How did Delilah know that Samson was now telling her the truth about his great strength? Had he not lied to her before and laughed at her discomfiture? This time Samson spoke the Name of the Lord and Delilah knew that he would not take the Name of God in vain.

וַיְהִי כִּי טוֹב לָבָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ: קִרְאוּ לְשִׁמְשׁוֹן וְיִשְׁחָק-לָנוּ.



And Samson called to the Lord: "Lord, God, remember me and give me strength just this once, O God, so that I may be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house was supported. And Samson said: "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might. The house

fell upon the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he killed during his life.

Then his kinsmen and all his father's household came down and took him and brought him up, and buried him in the burying-place of Manoah, his father. And he judged Israel twenty years. [3]

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❧ [3] AND HE JUDGED ISRAEL TWENTY YEARS: The Rabbis asked why these words were repeated for did not Scripture say earlier that Samson had judged Israel for twenty years (15:20)? The Rabbis explained by saying that Samson judged Israel twenty years while he was alive and for a full twenty years after his death Samson's influence remained. The Philistines still feared him and dared not oppress Israel until twenty years had passed.

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמֶשׁוֹן: תָּמוּת נַפְשִׁי עִם פְּלִשְׁתִּים.



## 10. I SAMUEL [1-4]

### THE PARENTS OF SAMUEL

THERE WAS a man of Ramah, in the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah. He had two wives. The name of one was Hannah and the other

Peninnah. Peninnah had children but Hannah had none.

And this man used to go [1] from his city from time to time to worship and sacrifice to the Lord in Shiloh. There the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas

[1] AND THIS MAN USED TO GO: Elkanah was a man of great merit and his name was known in all Israel because of his pilgrimages. Four times a year Elkanah went up to the Tabernacle of Shiloh, three times as prescribed by the Torah, and once a year to fulfill his vow to sacrifice to the Lord. Each time he went he took a different route and stopped in different towns. He did this deliberately to bring more people to the service of the Lord.

On his pilgrimages Elkanah took his wives, children and relatives, all of his household. No quarters were large enough to accommodate

וְלוֹ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים, שֵׁם אַחַת חַנָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פְּנִינָה. וַיְהִי לַפְּנִינָה יְלָדִים וּלְחַנָּה אֵין יְלָדִים.

were priests to the Lord. On the day that Elkanah sacrificed he gave portions to Peninnah his wife and all her sons and daughters, and to Hannah he gave

a double portion, for he loved her, [2] though she was childless.

And when Elkanah went up to sacrifice, her rival taunted her, so that she

such a large retinue so they lodged in tents in the town squares. There the people gathered to watch, asking: "Whither do you journey?" And Elkanah always answered: "To the Sanctuary in Shiloh from whence goes forth the Torah of the Lord and where we are taught to observe the Law and to perform the *mitzvot*. Join us so that you too will merit God's grace." Because Elkanah was sincere and persuasive, many people responded and followed him to the Tabernacle at Shiloh.

Soon Israel observed the three pilgrimages as prescribed by the Torah. They abandoned the worship of idols and began to cleave to the Lord. Then the Lord said: "Elkanah has turned the heart of My people away from idol worship and brought them near to Me. He merits to be the father of a son who will make the hearts of all Israel yearn for the Lord."



[2] HE LOVED HER: Hannah was one of the seven prophetesses of Israel. She had been married to Elkanah for ten years but bore him no children. Because she wanted her beloved husband to have an heir, she insisted that Elkanah take a second wife, as was the custom in those times. Elkanah then took Peninnah who bore him a child every year. In time Peninnah began to look on the barren Hannah with disdain and often she taunted and mocked her.

Hannah's heart was heavy and full of sorrow and she poured out her heart in prayer before God. In her great grief she spoke rebelliously to the Lord, saying, "Lord of the universe, You are like a king who has made a sumptuous banquet for hundreds of people. A poor and hungry man came and stood at the door asking for a crust of bread but the servants turned him away. The poor man then approached the king and said, 'Your Majesty, your tables are laden

וְלַחֲנָה יִתֵּן מִנֶּה אֶחָת אֶפְסִים כִּי אֶת חֲנָה אָהַב, וַיֵּי סָגַר רַחֲמָהּ.

wept and could not eat. Then her husband Elkanah said to her: "Hannah, why do you weep and not eat? Why is your heart so sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

And after they ate and drank, Hannah arose and stood before the Lord and prayed. She wept bitterly and vowed, "O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look upon the affliction of Thy handmaiden, and remember me, and give me a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come on his head."

And Eli, the priest, was sitting upon his seat by the doorposts of the temple of the Lord, and he watched her mouth. She prayed for a long time, speaking to herself. Only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. And Eli thought that she was drunk, and he said: "How long will you display yourself drunken? Put away your wine [and depart from the presence of the Lord]."

And Hannah answered: "Do not take me for a worthless woman. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink. I have poured out my heart before the Lord because I am a very unhappy woman."

And Eli answered her: "Go in peace,

and may the God of Israel grant your petition."

So Hannah went her way, and she was not sad any longer. They rose early the next morning, and they worshiped before the Lord and returned to their home.

#### THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

AT THE TURN of the year Hannah bore a son, and she called him Samuel. Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, but Hannah did not go up, for she said to Elkanah: "When the child is weaned, then I shall bring him before the Lord, and he will remain there forever."

And Elkanah said to her: "Do what seems best to you."

Hannah waited and nursed her son until she weaned him. Then she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bullock and an ephah of meal, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the Lord's house in Shiloh. And the boy was a real boy. After the bullock had been sacrificed, she brought the child to Eli, and said: "O my lord, I am the woman who stood here in your pres-

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with food, will you not spare a crust for a hungry man?' So, Lord, look! Hosts come to Your Tabernacle; multitudes come up to Your Sanctuary in Shiloh. Cannot You spare a child also for me?"

וַיִּכְרַתְנִי וְלֹא תִשָּׁכַח אֶת אִמָּתְךָ, וְנִתְּתָה לְאִמָּתְךָ זֶרַע אֲנָשִׁים, וְנִתְּתִיו לַיהוָה כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו.

ence praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord granted my petition. So I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is set apart to the Lord."

#### HANNAH'S SONG OF THANKS

AND HANNAH prayed and said:

"My heart is joyful with the Lord  
There is none so holy as the Lord,  
For there is none besides Thee;  
Neither is there a Rock like our  
God.

Do not boast so proudly!  
 Let no arrogance escape your  
 mouth,  
 For the Lord is a God of  
 knowledge,  
 And deeds are weighed by Him.  
 The bows of mighty men are  
 broken,  
 And they that stumble are braced  
 with strength.  
 And they that were hungry have  
 ceased to hunger,  
 The barren has borne seven,  
 She that had many is bereaved.  
 The Lord puts to death and gives  
 life;  
 He brings down to the grave and  
 brings up.  
 The Lord makes poor and makes  
 rich

He humbles and exalts;  
 He lifts up the needy from the  
 refuse heap  
 To make them sit with the noble  
 And inherit the throne of glory.

He guards the feet of His pious  
 ones,  
 And the wicked He puts to  
 silence in darkness;  
 For not by might shall men prevail.  
 They that contend with the Lord  
 shall be broken;  
 Against them will He thunder in  
 Heaven.  
 The Lord judges to the very ends  
 of the earth.

Elkanah went to Ramah, to his house.  
 And the Lord blessed Hannah and she  
 became pregnant. She bore three sons  
 and two daughters. And the boy Samuel  
 grew in the service of the Lord.

#### THE WICKEDNESS OF ELI'S SONS

THE SONS OF Eli were base men. They  
 cared not for the Lord, [nor the priests'  
 due from the people]. Whenever a man  
 offered a sacrifice, the priest's attendant  
 would come with a three-pronged fork  
 in his hand, and he would thrust it into  
 the pot. All that the fork brought up  
 would be taken for the priest. If the  
 man said: "Let the fat be burned first,  
 then take as much as you desire," the

אֵין קָדוֹשׁ כִּי אֵין בְּלִתִּי, וְאֵין צוּר כְּאַלֵּהֵינוּ.

servant would say: "No, give it to me now, or I will take it by force." The sons also abused the women who assembled to pray at the door of the Sanctuary of the House of the Lord.

Eli was very old and he heard all that his sons did to Israel, and he said to them: "Why do you do such things? I hear evil reports concerning you from all this people. If a man sins against another, God shall judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" But his sons would not listen to their father.

#### THE YOUNG SAMUEL

SAMUEL MINISTERED before the Lord, girded with a linen ephod. His mother used to make a little robe which she brought to him year after year, when

she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. The boy grew older and found favor with the Lord and with the Lord's people.

#### THE CALL

AND THE LAD Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days: there was no frequent vision. Eli's eyes became so dim that he could not see. And it happened that Eli lay down in his place, and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel lay down to sleep in the Sanctuary of the Lord, where the Ark of God was. And the Lord called [3] to Samuel. And he said: "Here I am," and he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me."

And he said: "I did not call; lie down

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❧ [3] THE LORD CALLED: When the Lord first revealed Himself to Samuel in the Sanctuary at Shiloh, Samuel was young and innocent, like a "naive calf." Samuel thought the Lord revealed Himself only in thunder and lightning, in storm and earthquake. When Samuel heard an ordinary voice, he did not suspect it was the Lord who spoke to him. Even after Eli had implied that it was the Lord calling him and had instructed him how to reply: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant hears," Samuel did not believe it. When he did hear the voice again, therefore, Samuel said, "Speak, for Thy servant hears," but he omitted the word, "Lord." Only later when he was older and more mature did Samuel come to understand that the prophet may hear the voice of the Lord in plain speech.

וַיִּקְרָא יְיָ אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל, וַיֹּאמֶר: הִנְנִי. וַיֵּרָץ אֶל עָלִי וַיֹּאמֶר: הִנְנִי כִי קָרָאתָ לִי.

again." And Samuel went and lay down.

Then the Lord called once again Samuel. Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said to him: "Here I am, for you called me."

And he answered: "I did not call you, my son. Lie down again."

The word of the Lord was not yet revealed to Samuel. When the Lord called Samuel the third time, he rose and went to Eli, and said: "Here I am. You called me."

Now Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the lad. He said to Samuel: "Go, lie down and if you are called, you shall say: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant hears!'" Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Then the Lord came [4] and stood and called as the other times: "Samuel! Samuel!" And he said: "Speak, for Thy servant hears."

And the Lord said to Samuel: "I am about to do a thing in Israel that will make the ears of every one who hears it tingle. I will punish the house of Eli forever for the iniquity, for his sons blasphemed, and he rebuked them not. Therefore I have sworn that the sins of Eli's house will not be expiated by sacrifice and offering."

Samuel lay until the morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. But he feared to tell Eli his vision. Then Eli called Samuel, and said: "Samuel, my son, what is the thing that He has spoken to you? I beg you, hide it not from me." Samuel told him. He hid nothing from him. Eli said: "Let Him do what seems good to Him."

And Samuel grew and the Lord was with him, and all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was chosen to be a prophet of the Lord.

🕊 [4] THE LORD CAME: When the Lord wanted to speak to Moses He would call him into the Tabernacle. But when God wanted to speak to Samuel He Himself would come to the prophet. Why, our Rabbis ask, this extra honor for Samuel?

The Lord said: "I do come to My people with justice and righteousness. Moses sat in one place and whoever had a matter for him came to him, and he judged between man and his neighbor (Exodus 18:16). But Samuel respected and honored My people. He went in a circuit to Beth-el, Gilgal and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all those places (I Samuel 7:16). Therefore he deserved extra honor. As he went to My people whenever they had a matter and he judged

הָיָה אֲנֹכִי עוֹשֶׂה דָּבָר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר כָּל שׁוֹמְעוֹ תִּצְלִינָה שְׁתֵּי אָזְנוֹי.

## WAR WITH THE PHILISTINES

AND THE PHILISTINES gathered to war against Israel. Then Israel went out against them in battle, and encamped at Eben-ezer and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. When the battle was joined, Israel was defeated by the Philistines who slew about four thousand men. When the people returned to camp, the elders of Israel said: "Why has the Lord routed us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, that He may come among us, and save us from our enemies."

The people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and the two sons of Eli,

Hophni and Phinehas were with the Ark. When the Ark was brought into the camp, all Israel raised a great shout so that the earth rang. When the Philistines heard the noise of the shout they knew that the Ark of the Lord had come into the camp. The Philistines were afraid, and [some of them] said: "God has come to the camp. Woe unto us! [5] Nothing like this has happened before." [Then the others said:] "Now, O Philistines, be brave and be men, lest you become slaves to the Israelites as they have been to you. Be men and fight."

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated. And they fled, every man to his tent. There was a great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand men and the Ark of God was captured

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between man and his neighbor, so will I go to him whenever he wants and needs My word."

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☞ [5] WOE UNTO US: Two groups of Philistines are here involved in an argument. One says, "Woe unto us! Who will deliver us from the hands of these mighty gods? The gods of Israel delivered them from Egypt and performed many miracles for them. They will perform a miracle for them now too." The other group replied: "The God of the Israelites is only one God. All He had was ten plagues. He punished the Egyptians with them and He has not a single plague left for His adversaries. So be brave and real men and fight!" Then the Lord said to them: "You say I have no plagues left, but I will bring upon you a plague which you never heard of."

שְׁמוּאֵל שֶׁהָלַךְ אֶצֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעִזְרוֹת וְדָן אוֹתָם – אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ וּמַדְבֵּר עִמּוֹ.



[6] and the two sons of Eli were killed.

A Benjamite ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh on the same day. His clothes were torn and earth was on his head. When the man came to the city and told the tidings, all the city cried out. Eli was sitting on his seat by the wayside, watching, for his heart trembled for the Ark of God. When Eli

heard the noise of the crying, he said: "What is the meaning of the noise of this tumult?" Eli was then ninety-eight years old and his eyes were so dim that he was blind. The man said to Eli: "I am he who came today out of the battle."

Eli asked: "How did things go, my son?" And he answered: "Israel fled be-

❧ [6] AND THE ARK OF GOD WAS CAPTURED: Why did the Ark of the Lord bring victory to Joshua when he marched around Jericho with it and the Israelites shouted with a great shout (Joshua 6:20) but did not when the sons of Eli brought the Ark of the Lord into the camp of the battlefield? Then too the Israelites shouted a great shout (I Samuel 4:5) yet the army was defeated and the Holy Ark was captured by the Philistines. Because, the Rabbis explain, in the time of the sons of Eli, the hearts of the people of Israel were far from the Lord. For years a divine voice was heard crying in the Tabernacle in Shiloh: "Begone, you sons of Eli, who defile the Sanctuary" (P'sahim 57a), but no one paid the voices any attention. The people did not reprove the sons of Eli but instead more and more followed the priest-leaders in their wicked ways.

When the Israelites were first defeated by the Philistines, the elders did not realize that it was because Israel had sinned. "Why has the Lord routed us before the Philistines?" they asked. And they decided to bring the Holy Ark into their camp so that the Lord might dwell among them.

Then the Lord replied: "You did not consider the Holy Ark when the sons of Eli provoked Me with their transgressions. Now, in your distress, you remember it. This is repentance without deeds." Because the people of Israel had not understood that the Holy Ark was only the symbol of God's holiness and Israel's righteousness, the Ark brought Israel no victory and was captured by the Philistines.

וְהָיָה עָלַי יוֹשֵׁב עַל הַכֶּסֶּא יְד דְּרָךְ מִצָּפָה, כִּי הָיָה לְבוֹ חֵרֶד עַל אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים.

fore the Philistines, and there was a great slaughter among the people. Your two sons are dead, and the Ark of God is taken." And when the man mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell from his seat backward and his neck was broken, and he died.

#### ICHABOD

HIS DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, Phinehas' wife,

was pregnant when she heard that her husband and her father-in-law were dead, and the Ark of God was captured. Her pains came suddenly upon her and she gave birth to a boy. The women who stood by said to her: "Fear not, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer. Then she named the child Ichabod, saying: "The glory is departed from Israel, because the Ark of God has been taken." And she died.

וַתִּקְרָא לַנֶּעֱר אִי כְבוֹד לֵאמֹר: גָּלָה כְבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, אֶל הַלָּקַח אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים.



## 11. I SAMUEL [5-10]

### THE PHILISTINES AND THE ARK

THE PHILISTINES took the Ark and brought it to the house of Dagon, in Ashdod, and put it by Dagon. The next day, when the people of Ashdod rose, they found Dagon prostrate on his face before the Ark of the Lord. They raised Dagon and sat him in his place again. But when the men of Ashdod arose early next morning, there was Dagon fallen, the head and both palms of the hands lay cut off upon the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

The hand of the Lord was heavy

upon the people of Ashdod. He brought upon them a plague of boils. When the people of Ashdod saw this, they said: "The Ark of the God of Israel shall not remain with us, for His hand is severe upon us and upon Dagon our god." So they sent the Ark to Ekron. The Ekronites cried out, "They brought the Ark of the God of Israel to kill us all." So they gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said: "Send away the Ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place, and not kill us."

The men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the Ark, and brought it to the house of Abinadab and sanctified Elea-

וַיִּשְׁפִּימוּ אֲשֶׁדּוּדִים מִמַּחֲרַת וְהָיָה דָּגוֹן נוֹפֵל לְפָנָיו אֶרְצָה לְפָנֵי אֲרוֹן יְיָ.

zar his son to take charge of the Ark of the Lord.

Lord.” Samuel became judge of the Children of Israel in Mizpah.

SAMUEL BECOMES A JUDGE

TWENTY YEARS passed from the day that the Ark was brought to Kiriath-jearim, and all the house of Israel yearned after the Lord. Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying: “If you do return to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods from among you and direct your hearts to the Lord, and serve only Him. Then He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” The Children of Israel did put away the Baalim and the Ash-taroath, and served the Lord only. So Samuel said: “Gather all Israel together, and I will pray for you to the Lord.”

They gathered together in Mizpah, and drew water [1] and poured it before the Lord. They fasted on that day, and said: “We have sinned against the

VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES

WHEN THE PHILISTINES heard that the Israelites were gathered together, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel to make war. When the Israelites heard it, they were terrified of the Philistines, and said to Samuel: “Do not cease crying to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” Samuel cried out to the Lord of Israel and the Lord answered him. As Samuel brought up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to do battle against Israel; but the Lord thundered with a great voice upon the Philistines, and routed them. Then the men of Israel went out of Mizpah, and pursued the Philistines and harassed them.

Samuel judged Israel [2] all the days

🕯 [1] THEY DREW WATER: Drawing the water and pouring it before the Lord was a symbolic act. The people poured out their hearts in repentance like water, saying: “Our hearts are as humble as is this water which is poured out before You.” Then Samuel stood in prayer and spoke to the Lord: “Your people now admit that they have sinned. Lord of the universe, You judge people only when they do not acknowledge their sins. But look at your people now!”

🕯 [2] SAMUEL JUDGED ISRAEL: Israel took the defeat by the Philistines

אל תַּחַרֶשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ מִזֶּעַק אֶל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַיִּוְשְׁעֵנוּ מִיַּד פְּלִשְׁתִּים.

of his life. He went on a circuit every year to Beth-el, Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in these places. Then he returned to Ramah, for there was his home, [3] and there he judged Israel and built an altar to the Lord.

#### THE ISRAELITES DEMAND A KING

WHEN SAMUEL became old he made his two sons Joel and Abijah judges over

Israel. But the sons walked not in his ways. [4] They took bribes and perverted justice.

Then the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel in Ramah and said: "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways. Appoint us a king [5] to judge us like all the nations." It displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us," and

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as a double omen: first, that the Lord had rejected them; and second that the Philistine gods were more powerful than the God of Israel. Samuel went to the villages teaching the people that neither of these was true. "The Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake; because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people unto Himself (I Samuel 12:22)." He reassured the Israelites that though the Philistines had temporarily triumphed, there was nothing to fear from their gods. "For they cannot profit and they cannot deliver" (12:21). Samuel emphasized that the Covenant between the Lord and His people was eternal and that if Israel returned to the Lord with all its heart, it would be united and overcome its enemies. After twenty years of such intense activity the Israelites were not only repentant, but "All the house of Israel yearned after the Lord." It was then that Samuel called an assembly in Mizpah and told the people that if "Israel served the Lord only," it could stand against the Philistines and conquer them.

🕊 [3] TO RAMAH, FOR THERE WAS HIS HOME: Our Rabbis ask: "It is written: he returned home to Ramah, for there was his home. Do we not know that Ramah was his home?" But the Sages answer that this teaches us that wherever Samuel traveled—Beth-el, Gilgal, Mizpah—he took his "home" with him. He was careful not to use any of the things from the people he judged; instead, he brought his own needs,

הָיָה אִתּוֹ זִקְנָתוֹ וּבְנָיָהּ לֹא הָלְכוּ בְּדַרְכָּיָהּ. עֲתָה שִׁימָה לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשִׁפְטֵנוּ כְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם.

he prayed to the Lord. The Lord said to Samuel: "Listen to the voice of the people, for it is not you whom they have rejected, but they have rejected

Me from being king over them. But forewarn them and tell them how the king shall behave who shall rule over them."

from kitchen utensils to food. In Rashi, the Hebrew reads: *shelo lehenot min ha'ahérim*, that is, Samuel did not partake of anything from a stranger.

❧ [4] HIS SONS WALKED NOT IN HIS WAYS: The verse, "They took bribes and perverted justice," should not be taken literally. The sons of Samuel were not like Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's sons. Our Rabbis tell us that the verse means that the sons fell short of their father's integrity. Samuel journeyed the entire circuit of the country to dispense justice, but his sons made the people from all parts of the country come to them in Beer-sheba. This system required a bureaucracy of officials, secretaries and clerks all of whom had to be paid from the public treasury. So the verse means that compared to Samuel's frugal dispensation of justice, it was as if they had taken bribes and perverted justice.

Other Sages say that the sons of Samuel were partners with many businessmen so that they had conflicting interests and could not render true and just decisions in lawsuits.

Still another tradition has it that the sons of Samuel were themselves in business. Judges cannot be businessmen; judges must devote their entire lives to considering and rendering justice.

❧ [5] APPOINT US A KING: Why was Samuel displeased when the Israelites asked for a king? The Torah states explicitly, "When you came to the land which the Lord, your God gives you, you shall set a king over you" (Deuteronomy 17:14-15). Why then did Samuel say: "Your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for yourself a king" (12:17)? The Rabbis say that two groups, the elders and the people asked for a king. The

שָׁמַע בְּקוֹל הָעָם, כִּי לֹא אוֹתָהּ מָאַסוּ כִּי אוֹתִי מָאַסוּ מִמֶּלֶךְ עָלֵיהֶם.

## THE KING'S WAYS

THEN SAMUEL told the words of the Lord to the people who asked for a king: "This will be the manner of the king who shall reign over you: He will take your sons for his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots. They will be his commanders of thousands and captains of fifties. They will plow his fields and reap his harvest; make his instruments of war and equipment for his chariot. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, to be cooks and to be bakers. He will take

your best fields and your vineyards and oliveyards, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain crops and of your vineyards, and give it to his officers and servants. He will take your manservants and maidservants and your donkeys and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his servants. Then you will cry on that day because of your king, but the Lord will not answer you."

But the people refused to listen to Samuel, and said: "No, there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like the other nations; that our king may judge us and fight our battles." [6]

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elders said, properly, "Appoint us a king." But the wicked said, "To judge us like all the nations." They wanted the king to judge them according to the pagan laws of the nations around them. They wanted to invalidate the Torah and that was why it was a sin.

Some Rabbis say that Samuel was dejected when the people asked him to appoint them a king because he felt it as a rebuke. He had judged Israel honestly and fairly, and led the Israelites well all his life, and now they wanted a king. Then the Lord spoke to Samuel, saying, "They want a king 'to judge them like all the nations.' It means that they do not want to be judged by My laws, but by pagan laws. They have not rejected you, Samuel; they have rejected Me."

🕊 [6] FIGHT OUR BATTLES: A king would be able to gather all the people together behind him, whereas until then only those tribes who were attacked had fought. The rest of the tribes had often not come to the help of those in danger or under attack.

זֶה יְהִיָּה מִשְׁפֹּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיכֶם: אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם יִקַּח וְשָׂם לוֹ בְּמִרְכָּבָתוֹ  
וּבְפָרָשָׁיו וְרָצוּ לִפְנֵי מִרְכָּבָתוֹ.

Samuel repeated this in the presence of the Lord. Then the Lord said to Samuel: "Listen to their voice and make them a king."

SAMUEL MEETS SAUL

THERE WAS a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, and he had a son whose name was Saul, [7] a handsome young man. There was not a man among all the Israelites more handsome than he. From his shoulders and upward he was taller than any of the people. Now, the donkeys of Kish were lost. Kish said to Saul: "Take one of the servants with

you, and go and search for the donkeys." So he went, and they passed through the hill country of Ephraim, but they found them not.

When they reached the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant: "Come, let us return lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious for us." And he answered: "There is in the city a man of God. Whatever he says comes surely to pass. Let us go to him. Perhaps he can tell us concerning our journey."

Saul said to his servant: "Well said, let us go."

As they went up the path to the city,

🕒 [7] SAUL: Why did Saul merit the kingdom? Because, the Rabbis tell us, of his heroism and his modesty and his considerateness; and also because of the good deeds of his grandfather. Saul distinguished himself in the battle against the Philistines in Eli's time by wresting the Tables of the Law from the hands of Goliath and returning them to the sanctuary in Shiloh. He showed his modesty after he was anointed and Samuel called a national assembly to proclaim him king; then Saul hid himself. He still believed himself unworthy of being king of Israel. Saul accepted only after he was told that the Lord had chosen him. His decency and humility were demonstrated when he and his servant were searching for the donkeys and he said, "My father will become anxious for us," showing that he considered the servant and himself equally.

Saul's grandfather was Ner (I Chronicles 8:33), which in Hebrew means *candle* or *lamp*. Ner was called that because he lit the streets at night so people might walk safely to the houses of worship and study.

וְאֵין אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ. מִשְׁכָּמוֹ וּמַעֲלָה גְבוּהַ מְכָל הָעָם.



they met young maidens [8] going to draw water. And they said: "Is the seer here?"

And they answered: "He is here. Make haste for he came today to the city, for the people have a sacrifice today in the high place. As soon as you come into the city you shall find him before he goes to the high place to eat. The people will not eat until he comes, because he blesses the sacrifice. Now therefore go, for at this time you will find him." They went up to the city. As they entered, Samuel came toward them.

Now a day before Saul came, the Lord revealed to Samuel, saying: "Tomorrow, about this time, I will send you a man out of the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, and he shall save them out of the hand of the Philistines."

When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord spoke to him: "This is the man of whom I said to you: 'He shall have rule over My people.'" When Saul came near Samuel in the gate, he said: "Tell me please, where is the seer's house?"

Samuel answered: "I am the seer.

Come with me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today. As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not worry. They are found. And to whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and all your father's house?"

And Saul answered: "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family is the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why do you speak to me in this manner?"

#### SAMUEL ANOINTS SAUL

SAMUEL BROUGHT Saul and his servant into the chamber and made them sit at the head of the guests. Samuel said to the cook: "Bring the portion which I told you to put aside." The cook took it and put it before Saul. So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

In the morning Samuel came and said to Saul: "Arise, I will escort you." They went out in the street, and when they were at the edge of the city, Samuel said to Saul: "Tell the servant to go ahead, but you stand here so that I may

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🔍 [8] YOUNG MAIDENS: When Saul asked the maidens the brief, "Is the seer here?" the girls replied with a long speech. They engaged in this long disquisition because Saul was very handsome and they wanted to enjoy his beauty.

הִנֵּה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֵלַיךְ: זֶה יַעֲצָר בְּעַמִּי.

make known to you the word of God.”

Then Samuel took the vial of oil and poured it on Saul’s head, kissed him, and said: “The Lord has anointed you to be a prince over His inheritance.”

And it was when Saul turned to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart. When he came to the hill a band of prophets met him. The spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. The people who knew him said one to another: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” Therefore, it became a proverb: “Is Saul also among the prophets?”

He ceased prophesying and went home. And Saul’s uncle said to him: “Where have you been?” And he answered: “We went to seek the donkeys. When we saw that we could not find them, we went to Samuel.”

The uncle said: “What did Samuel say to you?” Saul answered: “He told me the donkeys were found.” But Saul did not mention the kingdom of which Samuel had spoken.

#### SAUL ELECTED KING

SAMUEL CALLED all the people together to the Lord in Mizpah. He said to the

Israelites: “Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: ‘I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the hand of all the kingdoms that oppressed you. But you have this day rejected your God who Himself saved you from your calamities. You said to Him: “But set a king over us.” Therefore, now take your stand before the Lord by your tribes and your clans [and we will see whom the Lord will select by lot].’”

When Samuel brought the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was selected by lot. He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by their families, and the family of the Matrites was taken. He made the family of the Matrites approach man by man, and Saul the son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he could not be found. They inquired of the Lord again: “Did the man come here?” And the Lord answered: “He hid himself among the supplies.” [9] They ran and brought him from there. He stood among the people and he was a head and shoulders taller than any of the people.

So Samuel said to all the people: “Look whom the Lord has chosen. There is none like him among all the

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🔍 [9] HE HID HIMSELF AMONG THE SUPPLIES: Saul was modest and humble. Even after he was anointed, he refused to accept the regal

עַל כֵּן הִיָּתָה לְמִשְׁלָל: הָגַם שָׁאוּל בְּנִבְיָאִים?

people.” Then all the people shouted:  
“Long live the king!”

Samuel recited before the people the custom of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord. Thereupon Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his home. Saul also

went to his home at Gibeah. There went with him brave men whose hearts God had touched. But there were some base fellows who said: “How shall this man save us?” They despised him and brought him no presents. But he ignored them and held his peace. [10]

dignities until they were forced on him. Yet when he was king and transgressed, when Samuel rebuked him and told him the Lord was departed from him, Saul was ready to kill David to keep his throne.

Rabbi Joshua said: “At first when they told me to ascend, I was ready to tie the hands and feet of those who nominated me and cast them to the lions. But now, after the honor has been bestowed upon me, whoever will say to me: ‘Descend!’ I am ready to scald with boiling water.”

❧ [10] AND HELD HIS PEACE: Our Sages say that Saul’s dynasty did not last because he forgave too easily those who insulted him. In thus disregarding the honor and dignity of his office, he weakened his ability to rule. When the base fellows scoffed and said, “How shall this man save us?” Saul kept his peace. After the victory over Nahash, when the people wanted to punish those men, Saul would not permit it. That proved that Saul was too unworldly to govern, Rabbi Ashi said. It is indicated in the Torah that people not only should respect and honor him, but have fear for him, or else he could not reign.

וַיִּרְיֵעוּ כָּל הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ: יְחִי הַמֶּלֶךְ!



## 12. I SAMUEL [11-15]

### THE INVASION OF NAHASH

NAHASH, THE AMMONITE, came and besieged Jabesh-gilead. All the men of Jabesh said to Nahash: "Make terms with us that we may serve you." Nahash said to them: "On this condition will I make a covenant with you: I shall gouge out your right eyes and thereby will I put a reproach upon all Israel."

The elders of Jabesh said to him: "Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then if there will be none to save us, we will come out and surrender to you."

The messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the people about Nahash, and all the people wept aloud. Just then Saul came from following the oxen in the field. He asked: "What troubles the people that they are weeping?" And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. When he heard them, the spirit of God came upon him, and he became very angry. He took a yoke of oxen and cut them to pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel, saying: "Whoever does not come forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen."

The terror of the Lord fell upon the

אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ יוֹצֵא אַחֲרֵי שְׂאוּל וְאַחֲרֵי שְׁמוּאֵל כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה לְבָקָרוֹ.

people, and they came out as one man. He numbered them in Bezek. The Israelites were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. Then Saul said to the messengers: "Thus shall you say to the elders of Jabesh-gilead: 'Tomorrow you will have deliverance by the time the sun is hot.'"

The men of Jabesh said to Nahash: "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us whatever you please."

#### SAUL IS PROCLAIMED KING

ON THE FOLLOWING day Saul divided the people into three companies. They came in the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and they routed the Ammonites by the time the sun was hot. The Ammonites scattered so that not two of them were left together. Then the people said to Samuel: "Where are those who said: 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men here so we may put them to death!"

But Saul said: "There shall not be a man put to death today, for today the Lord has brought deliverance to Israel."

Then Samuel said: "Let us go to Gilgal, and there renew the kingdom." So all the people went to Gilgal and there they proclaimed Saul king before the Lord. All the people and Saul rejoiced greatly.

#### SAMUEL'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

AND SAMUEL said to Israel: "I have listened to you and made a king over you. Now the king walks before you, and I am old and gray, and my sons are among you. And I have walked before you from my youth to this day. Here I am. Testify before the Lord and before His anointed; whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I defrauded, or whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes? Testify against me and I will restore it to you."

And the people answered: "You have not defrauded us, nor oppressed us; neither have you taken anything from any man's hand."

He said to them: "The Lord is witness and His anointed is witness that you have not found anything in my hand."

And they said: "He is witness."

Then Samuel said: "Here is the king you have chosen and you have asked for. The Lord set a king over you. But you shall know that your wickedness is great in the sight of the Lord in asking for a king."

Then all the people said to Samuel: "Pray for us to the Lord your God in behalf of your servants. We have added to all our sins [1] the wickedness of asking for a king."

אֶת שׁוֹר מִי לְקַחְתִּי, וְחֶמְזֹר מִי לְקַחְתִּי; וְאֶת מִי עֲשִׂקְתִּי, אֶת מִי רִצּוֹתִי?

Samuel answered: "Fear not. Indeed, you have done all this evil, but turn not aside after vain things which cannot profit nor deliver. But serve the Lord. If you serve Him and listen to His voice and do not rebel against the commandments of the Lord, it will be well for both—for you and the king who reigns over you. But if you persist in doing evil you shall be swept away, you and your king. But the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake. It pleases the Lord to make you a people for Himself. Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in not praying for you."

#### WAR WITH THE PHILISTINES

WHEN SAUL had reigned [two] years,

[2] in the second year of his reign over Israel, Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with him in Michmas, and a thousand with Jonathan in Gibeah. Then Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines in Geba, and overcame it. The Philistines heard of it.

Saul blew the *Shofar* throughout Israel, and all Israel heard that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines. So the people gathered together after Saul in Gilgal, and the Philistines assembled to fight Israel. They mustered against Israel thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore.

Now, there was not a blacksmith found throughout all the Land of Israel,

❧ [1] WE HAVE ADDED TO ALL OUR SINS: When the Israelites confessed to Samuel that they had sinned and wanted to repent, Samuel replied, "Fear not. Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in not praying for you." Samuel had rebuked the people severely but when they admitted their sins, he was reconciled and willing to pray for them.

Our Sages say that this teaches us that if a man wrongs someone, repents and asks forgiveness, then the wronged man should promptly forgive him. If he does not, he is to be considered cruel and brutal.

❧ [2] SAUL HAD REIGNED: Why does the Bible say that Saul was only one year old when he came to the throne? Was he really only an infant? Rabbi Huna explains that Saul was as innocent as an infant of a year who has not yet tasted the sins of men.

כִּי לֹא יָטַשׁ יְיָ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּעֶבְיֹר שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל, כִּי הוֹאִיל יְיָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲתָכֶם לֹ לְעָצֶם.

for the Philistines said: "Lest the Hebrews make sword or spear." So neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people of Israel; only Saul and Jonathan had them.

#### JONATHAN'S HEROISM

ONE DAY JONATHAN, the son of Saul, said to the youth who was his armor-bearer: "Come, let us go over to the garrison of the Philistines that is on the other side of that crag. It may be that the Lord will give us deliverance for the Lord has no difficulty in delivering by many or by few." And the armor-bearer said to him: "Do whatever is in your heart. I am with you."

At the first attack which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made they killed about twenty men. Terror spread in the camp of the Philistines and in the field and in the whole garrison. The earth quaked and it became a mighty panic.

The watchmen of Saul in Gibeah looked and they saw the camp of the Philistines melted away. Saul said: "Search and see who is gone from us." They investigated and they saw that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. While Saul was talking with the priest the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased, so Saul and the people with him gathered together and

came to the battlefield. They saw that every man's sword was against his fellow's, and there was wild confusion. The Philistines fled. When all Israel heard it they pursued them hard in the battle.

Saul charged the people, saying: "Cursed be the man who will eat any food until evening, that I be avenged on my enemies." All the people came into the forest and there was honey on the ground, but no man put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan did not hear when his father charged the people with the oath, so he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, his eyes brightened. Then the people said: "Your father strictly charged the people and he said, 'Cursed be the man who eats any food until evening.'" Then Jonathan said: "My father brought trouble on the people. Look, my eyes brightened because I tasted a little honey. How much greater would have been the defeat of the Philistines if the people had eaten freely today of the spoils of the enemy which they found."

[It became known to Saul what Jonathan did] and he said: "Jonathan, you shall surely die." And the people said to Saul: "Shall Jonathan die, he who

וַיֹּאמֶר הָעָם אֶל שָׁאוּל: הֲיִוָּנָתָן יָמוּת, אֲשֶׁר...

has brought this great deliverance to Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, not one hair of [3] his head shall fall to the ground." The people ransomed Jonathan and he did not die.

So Saul established his kingdom firmly, and fought against Israel's enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines; and whichever way he turned, he put them to the worse. And he did valiantly, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that

spoiled them. The fighting with the Philistines was severe throughout all his reign. And whenever Saul saw a mighty man or a valiant man, he took him for himself.

#### WAR WITH AMALEK

SAMUEL SAID to Saul: "The Lord sent me to anoint you to be king over His people Israel. Now, therefore, listen to the voice of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I remember that which Amalek did to Israel when he came out of Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek.

🔗 [3] NOT ONE HAIR: Why did Jonathan accept without protest Saul's verdict that he would surely die? According to law, Jonathan was not guilty of any transgression. He was not present when his father charged the people not to eat and had therefore not heard Saul's charge. Second, he had only tasted some honey which is considered neither eating nor drinking.

Medieval commentators interpreted this story as follows. Most of the soldiers could not know that Jonathan had not heard Saul's command. They were also not legalists who knew that tasting honey is not considered eating or drinking. Therefore, if Saul had not punished him they would have thought that Saul was showing favoritism because Jonathan was his son. Saul proclaimed him guilty and Jonathan accepted the judgment for the morale of the army.

The soldiers who were with Jonathan knew that he could not have heard Saul's command and it was they who demanded the judgment be revoked. Investigation was begun and Jonathan was cleared at a public hearing.

...עָשָׂה הַיְשׁוּעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל? חֲלִילָהּ, חַי יְיָ אִם יִפֹּל מִשְׁעֶרֶת רֹאשׁוֹ  
אַרְצָה.



[4] Destroy all they have [5] and spare him not.’”

Saul summoned the people and he numbered them in Telaim; [6] two hundred thousand foot-men, and ten

thousand men of Judah. He came to the encampment of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. And Saul said to the Kenites: “Go, depart from among the Amalekites, for you showed kindness to

🔗 [4] NOW GO AND ATTACK AMALEK: When Saul was told to attack Amalek, he asked: “How is it that the Lord told me to make war? He has told us that if a man is found slain in the field and it is not known who killed him, we must expiate the unsolved murder by the ceremony of a heifer. The elders must publicly declare: ‘Our hands have not shed this blood’ (Deuteronomy 21:7). Now the Lord tells me to make war. Many will be killed, both young and old, and the innocent as well.”

Then a voice from heaven called: “Be not overmuch righteous. Whoever is compassionate when and where he must be severe and merciless will turn out to be merciless and brutal when he should be compassionate.”

🔗 [5] DESTROY ALL THEY HAVE: How had the cattle given offense? Samuel told Saul to destroy even the cattle lest the other nations say that the Israelites had made war for spoils and plunder. Only in this way could it be made clear that this was a war not of aggrandizement but to safeguard Israel.

🔗 [6] HE NUMBERED THEM IN TELAIM: All ancient people hated to be counted because they thought that it tempted fate. To circumvent this superstition, leaders had each man deposit a stone or a pottery shard in a pile and then they counted the pile. So, the Midrash tells us, we have two censuses here: *Telaim* means lambs and *Bezek* (11:8) means pottery. In the beginning of Saul’s reign Israel was so poor that each man who joined the army brought only a shard of pottery with him. When Israel prospered Saul ordered each soldier to bring a lamb to be counted.

אֵל תְּהִי צַדִּיק הַרְבֵּה.

the Israelites when they came out of Egypt." And the Kenites departed.

Saul defeated the Amalekites, and captured Agag, their king, alive. But Saul and the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, and all that was good they did not destroy. Only that which was of no account and feeble they destroyed.

#### THE REJECTION OF SAUL

THEN THE WORD of the Lord came to Samuel, saying: "I repent that I have set up Saul as king, for he turned back from following Me and did not carry out My command." Samuel was grieved, and prayed to the Lord all night. [7]

Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning and he was told: "Saul came down to Carmel and set up a monument, and he has gone down to Gilgal."

When Samuel met Saul, Saul said to him: "May the Lord bless you. I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

Then Samuel said: "What is the bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

And Saul said: "The people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God. The rest we have utterly destroyed."

Then Samuel said: "Be silent! Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night."

Saul said, "Speak!"

Samuel said: "Though you are little in your eyes, but are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. The Lord sent you on a mission and said: 'Go and wipe out the sinners, the Amalekites.' Why did you not listen to the voice of the

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🕊 [7] AND HE PRAYED TO THE LORD ALL NIGHT: Rabbi Johanan said: "Old age came prematurely to Samuel when the Lord said: 'I regret that I have made Saul king.'" And Samuel complained, "Sovereign of the universe, You have made me equal to Moses and Aaron. The work of their hands did not come to naught in their lifetimes. So, too, let not the work of my hands come to naught in mine." Then the Lord replied: "The time has come for David to reign and no reign may encroach on another even by a hairsbreadth."

Then Samuel mourned for Saul and was not comforted. His hair turned gray overnight and he died seven months before Saul was killed at Gilboa.

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל: וְמָה קוֹל הַצֹּאן הַזֶּה בְּאָזְנִי, וְקוֹל הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי שׁוֹמֵעַ?

Lord, but you did fly upon the spoil to do evil in the eyes of the Lord?”

#### THE PROPHET'S REBUKE

SAUL SAID to Samuel: “Yes, I have listened to the voice of the Lord, I have gone the way the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag, the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the devoted things to sacrifice to the Lord [8] your God in Gilgal.”

Samuel answered:

“Does the Lord delight in burnt-  
offerings and sacrifices  
As much as in listening to the  
voice of the Lord?”

No, to obey is better than  
sacrifices  
And to hearken, than the fat of  
rams.

Rebellion is as the sin of  
witchcraft  
And stubbornness is as idolatry  
of teraphim.  
Because you have rejected the  
word of the Lord,  
He has also rejected you from  
being king.”

And Saul said to Samuel: “I have sinned. [9] For I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, because I feared the people [10] and listened to their voice. Now, therefore, I beg you to pardon my sin and turn back

❧ [8] TO SACRIFICE TO THE LORD: Saul tried to justify sparing the best of the cattle by saying he wanted to offer them as sacrifices to the Lord. Samuel rebuked him saying that God has no need for sacrifice but for obedience. When a man wishes to bring a sacrifice, it signifies that he seeks God's nearness. The root of the word *korban* (sacrifice) is *karov*, or nearness. True sacrifice, therefore, is that which brings man nearer to God and His ways. The Lord does not delight in burnt-offerings; He delights in the man who would draw near to Him with his whole heart.

❧ [9] I HAVE SINNED: Why was Saul's repentance unacceptable? Three requirements are necessary for true repentance: (1) the sinner must know he has sinned; (2) he must not excuse himself for his sin; (3) his repentance must be entirely for love of God and goodness, not for the sake of gain. Saul's repentance lacked these

הַחֶפֶץ לִי בְּעוֹלוֹת וּבָחִים כְּשֶׁמַּע בְּקוֹל יְיָ הִנֵּה שָׁמַע מְזַבַּח טוֹב, לְהִקְשִׁיב –  
מִחֻלָּב אֵילִים.

with me so that I may worship the Lord.”

Samuel answered: “I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.”

three elements for even when he confessed he laid the blame on the people. Only when Saul says simply, “I have sinned,” does Samuel consent to return with him.

❧ [10] BECAUSE I FEARED THE PEOPLE: The Sages asked: “David sinned far more grievously than did Saul. Why, then, was David forgiven and Saul punished and the kingdom taken from him?”

Because, the Rabbis tell us, David repented at once. When the prophet Nathan rebuked him, David replied immediately: “I have sinned against the Lord.”

But when Samuel rebuked Saul, Saul was brazen. He said he had fulfilled God’s command and killed the cattle when Samuel could hear the bleating sheep and the lowing herd. “Whoever confesses will find mercy,” the Sages said. But Saul neither confessed, nor repented, and therefore he was punished.

Saul also justified himself by saying that the people had spared the best cattle to sacrifice to the Lord. Samuel responded: “Dare you forget that you are an anointed king, consecrated by the Lord? You are to lead the people and to teach them the Lord’s commandments. You hearkened unto the people’s lust for booty because your own eyes darted greedily after the spoils.”

Finally, when Samuel rebuked Saul for his transgression, Saul gave the excuse: “I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and your word, because I feared the people.” A king who fears his people cannot rule and Samuel turned away from him.

When Saul tore his garment, Samuel saw it as an omen. The Rabbis said that Samuel then told Saul: “Whoever cuts off a piece of your garment will reign after you.” When later David cut off the hem of Saul’s robe and showed it to him (24:21), Saul said, “Now I know that you will surely rule in my stead.”

כִּי מֵאַסְתָּה אֶת דְּבַר יְיָ, וַיִּמָּאֲסֶךָ יְיָ מֵהָיוֹת מֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

As Samuel turned about to go, Saul caught the skirt of Samuel's robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him: "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you and given it to one better than you. Moreover the Glory of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man that He should repent."

And Saul said: "I have sinned, yet honor me now before the elders of my

people and before Israel. Return with me that I may worship the Lord, your God."

So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house, to Gibeah. Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord repented that He made Saul king over Israel.

קָרַע יְיָ אֶת מַמְלְכוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעָלֶיךָ הַיּוֹם וּנְתָנָהּ לְרֵעֶךָ הַטּוֹב מִמֶּךָּ.



## 13. I SAMUEL [16-19]

### SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID KING

THE LORD SAID to Samuel: "How long will you mourn [1] for Saul, when I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go

to Jesse, the Beth-lehemite, for I have found Me a king [2] among his sons."

Samuel said: "How can I go? Saul will hear of it and kill me." [3]

And the Lord said: "Take a heifer with you and you will say to the peo-

[1] HOW LONG WILL YOU MOURN: The Lord said to Samuel: "I rejected him and it is not proper or suitable to grieve over him for too long a time." Jewish law is very specific about grief for the dead. Our Sages say: "Whoever grieves too much and too long over the dead is a fool; but whoever does not mourn properly is a brute."

The Midrash also tells us that if a man mourns too long, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, rebukes him, saying: "Are you more compassionate toward the departed one than I?"

מִלֵּא קֶרֶןךָ שֶׁמֶן וְלֵךְ אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ אֶל יֹשֵׁי בֵּית-הַלְחָמִי, כִּי רָאִיתִי בְּבָנָיו לִי מֶלֶךְ.

ple: 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Call Jesse to the sacrifice, and you shall anoint to Me him whom I name."

Samuel did that which the Lord spoke. When he came to Beth-lehem, the elders of the city trembling came to meet Samuel, and they said, "Do you come in peace?"

He answered: "Peace! I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Sanctify yourself, and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he himself went to sanctify Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. When they came before him and he saw Eliab, [4] Samuel said to himself: "Surely he is the Lord's anointed."

But the Lord said to him: "Do not look at his appearance, his height or his stature. I rejected him. The Lord does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord

looks at the heart." Then Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel and Samuel said to him: "The Lord has not chosen these. Are these all your sons?"

Jesse said: "There is still the youngest, and he keeps the sheep."

Samuel said to Jesse: "Send for him." Jesse sent and brought him in. Now, he was ruddy with beautiful eyes and good to look upon. The Lord said to Samuel: "Arise and anoint him, for this is he." Samuel took the oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. Then Samuel arose and went to Ramah. The spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day onward.

#### DAVID IN SAUL'S COURT

THE SPIRIT OF the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrified him. Saul's servants said to him: "Now, an evil spirit from God

🕯 [2] I HAVE FOUND ME A KING: The Lord did not say, "I have found a king for Israel," but instead, "I have found Me a king," a king who will obey Me and will listen to My commandments. Not like Saul who would not obey.

🕯 [3] SAUL WILL KILL ME: We know that whoever goes to do a good deed, a *mitzvah*, is protected by the Lord from injury or damage. Why, then, was Samuel afraid? The answer of the Rabbis was that when there is a clear and present danger this does not apply. The Lord recognized the truth of Samuel's plea and told Samuel to disguise his mission and that He would protect him.

כִּי הָאָדָם יִרְאֶה לְעֵינָיִם וַיִּי יִרְאֶה לִּלְבָב.

terrifies you. Let our lord command your servants to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp. Then, whenever the evil spirit from God comes upon you, he shall play for you, and you shall be well."

Saul said to his servants: "Find me a man who can play well, and bring him to me." Then answered a young man: "I have seen a son of Jesse in Beth-lehem, a skillful player, a man of valor, and a man of war, prudent and a comely person, and the Lord is with him."

Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said: "Send me David your son who is with the sheep." So Jesse loaded a donkey with some bread, a skin of wine and a kid and sent them with his son David to Saul. David came to Saul, and stood before him. Saul loved him and

made him his armor-bearer. Whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took his harp and played. Saul was relieved and felt well, for the evil spirit departed from him.

Now David went to and from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Beth-lehem.

#### DAVID AND GOLIATH

THE PHILISTINES gathered together their armies for war, and Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together and arrayed for battle. The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side and the Israelites stood on the mountain on the other side, and between them was a valley.

There came out a champion from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Gath. [5] He was nine feet six inches tall; a brass helmet on his head and

🔥 [4] HE SAW ELIAB: When Saul asked Samuel, "Where is the seer's house?" Samuel replied, "I am the seer." The Lord thought this immodest and when Samuel went to anoint Saul's successor, the Lord left him to his own devices as a reminder of how the prophetic vision descended upon him from the Lord.

When Samuel arrived at Jesse's house, he saw the tall, handsome Eliab and said to himself, "Surely he is the Lord's anointed."

Then God told him: "You are mistaken. You are only human and look at the outward appearance, but the Lord sees into the heart. Eliab is not fit to be king because his anger is too swift."

🔥 [5] GOLIATH OF GATH: Goliath was challenging Saul, the king of the Israelites, who stood head and shoulders above any man in Israel.

הָיָה רָאִיתִי בֵּן לְיִשִּׁי בֵּית הַלְחָמִי; יוֹדֵעַ נֶגֶן, וְגִבּוֹר חֵיל, וְאִישׁ מִלְחָמָה, וְנָבוֹן דָּבָר, וְאִישׁ תָּאֵר וַיִּי עָמוּ.



dressed in coat of mail. The weight of the coat was about two hundred and twenty pounds. He had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a brass javelin between his shoulders. He stood and cried out to the armies of Israel: "Why did you draw up in battle array? Choose for yourself a man, and let him come down to me. If he will overcome me and kill me, then we will be your servant. But if I overcome him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us."

The Philistine champion came forward for forty days, morning and eve-

ning, saying: "I taunt the armies of Israel. Give me a man, that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard the words of the Philistine they were dismayed and terrified.

Then David said to Saul: "Let no man be frightened [6] because of him. Your servant will go and fight this Philistine."

Saul said to David: "You are not able to go and fight this Philistine, for you are but a youth and he is a man of war from his youth."

David said to Saul: "Your servant kept his father's sheep, and when a lion,

The Philistine giant intended to humiliate Saul who years before at the battle of Shiloh had wrested the Tablets of the Law from his hands. Goliath bellowed: "Why are you people of Israel gathered to make war against us Philistines? You are nothing but slaves to Saul. But I, Goliath of Gath, have killed your two priests, Hophni and Phinehas. I captured the Ark of the Covenant of your God and brought it to the temple of Dagon. I have fought in every campaign of our armies, killed and trampled on as many people as there is sand upon the shores of the sea. What did your King Saul do? What prowess did he show? Yet you made him king. If he is strong and brave, let him come forth and fight with me."



[6] LET NO MAN BE FRIGHTENED: David lost his fear of Goliath when he heard the Philistine giant say, "If your Israelites have no brave men among you, then send me your God, who is supposed to be a great warrior. Your Moses said:

The Lord is a man of war,

The Lord is His name (Exodus 15:3)."

אֵל יִפְּלֵ לֵב אָדָם עָלָיו; עֲבֹדֶךָ יְיָ וְנִלְחָם עִם הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הַזֶּה.

or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him, smote him and saved it from his mouth. If he rose up against me, I caught him by the beard and killed him. Both lion and bear I killed, and this Philistine shall be as one of them, for he taunted the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the lion and the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David: “Go, and the Lord shall be with you.” Then Saul

clad David with his apparel, and put a helmet of brass upon his head, and clad him with a coat of mail. David girded his sword over the apparel and attempted to walk, but he could not. David said to Saul: “I cannot go with these, [7] for I am not used to them.” So David took them off. He took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in his shepherd’s bag. With the sling in his hand, he advanced toward the Philistine.

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David saw how huge Goliath was, how heavily armed. Goliath carried a sword, a spear and a javelin. “Any one of those weapons should have been enough,” David thought. “But I can overcome him because he has no fear of God, he blasphemes, and he does not understand the spirit in man. This giant is nothing—his shadow has departed from him.” Then David called out: “You come to me with a sword, a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord.” Thus our Sages remind us that size and physical might do not necessarily bring victory; spirit and dedication do.

❧ [7] I CANNOT GO WITH THESE: Because Saul’s armor did fit David the boy looked kingly in the royal armor. Since he was head and shoulders taller than any man in Israel Saul wondered how this boy should wear his armor and he jealously considered whether David was destined to rule in his place. As he did so a look of hatred crossed his face.

David saw Saul’s look and at once said: “This armor is too heavy for me. I cannot wear it.” David said to Saul: “Your servant has been guarding his father’s sheep and killed the lion and the bear. Am I so important and esteemed to be granted such prowess by the

גַּם אֶת הָאָרִי גַם אֶת הַדָּב הַכָּה עָבַדְתִּי, וְהָיָה הַפִּלִּשְׁתִּי הַזֶּה כְּאַחַד מֵהֶם, כִּי חִרְף מַעֲרָכוֹת אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים.

When the Philistine looked about and saw David, he despised him [8] for he was a youth, ruddy and handsome, and he said to David: "Am I a dog that you came to me with sticks?" Goliath cursed David by his god.

Then he said to David: "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the cattle of the field."

And David said to the Philistine: "You come to me with a sword, a spear and javelin, but I come to you in the

name of the Lord, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, that I may smite you and take your head off. And I will give the carcasses of the Philistine host to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth. Then all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel."

The Philistine rose and as he came to meet David, David hastened and ran to meet him. Then David put his hand into his bag, and took from it a stone,

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Lord to overcome powerful beasts? The Lord gave me strength and valor as an omen, an indication that Israel will be saved by such powers." Then David went out and found five white stones in the brook. With them he advanced against Goliath. The giant was immense and David thought, "How can any man stand before such a monster?" But when Goliath began to mock Israel and curse God David knew that he could stand against him. "I can defeat Goliath because I fight for the Lord and He will give me strength."

❧ [8] HE DESPISED HIM: When Goliath saw David he was so astonished by the youth that he remained rooted to the ground. Used to facing hardened warriors and expecting a seasoned fighter, Goliath saw only a stripling and was taken aback. So confused was he that he scarcely knew what he was saying. "I will give your flesh to . . . the cattle of the field," he threatened. Do cattle eat flesh? At that David knew that the giant was doomed and replied, "I will give your carcass to the birds of the air." When Goliath heard David speak of "birds of the air" he raised his eyes skyward, lifting his visor so that he could see and the stone aimed by David struck his unprotected forehead and killed him.

אָתָּה בָּא אֵלַי בְּחָרָב וּבַחֲנִית וּבַכִּידוֹן, וְאַנֹכִי בָא אֵלֶיךָ בְּשֵׁם יְיָ צְבָאוֹת, אֱלֹהֵי  
מַעְרְכֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר חִרְפָּתָּ.

put it in his sling and slung it. The stone struck the Philistine on his forehead. It sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face [9] to the ground. David ran to the fallen Philistine, drew out the Philistine's sword from its sheath, and killed him. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The man of Israel and of Judah pursued the Philistines as far as the gates of Gath and Ekron.

Saul took David that day into his service and did not let him go home to his father's house.

#### SAUL'S JEALOUSY OF DAVID

SAUL PUT DAVID over the men of war, and it pleased all the people and the

servants of Saul. When Saul and David returned from fighting the Philistines the women from all the cities of Israel came out, singing and dancing to meet them, with tambourines, with joy and with three-stringed instruments. The women sang:

"Saul has slain his thousands [10]  
But David his ten thousands."

Then Saul became very angry, for their saying displeased him. He said: "They have ascribed to David the ten thousands, and to me the thousands. All he lacks is the kingdom!" From that day onward Saul eyed David.

On the next day the evil spirit of God came upon Saul, and he raved within the house, while David played

❧ [9] GOLIATH FELL ON HIS FACE: Why did Goliath fall on his face? Would it not have been more natural for a man struck in the forehead to fall backward? Because Goliath had blasphemed with his mouth and because he bore the image of his idol Dagon on his breastplate, God wanted to humble both. When Goliath fell, his mouth was in the dust and so was his breastplate, thus fulfilling the verse (Leviticus 26:30) "I will . . . cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols."

❧ [10] SAUL HAS SLAIN: David had just saved the kingdom and Saul's own life. Why was Saul so angry? Should he not have rejoiced with the women for Israel's redemption from the enemy? Because of his jealousy of David Saul thought that the women had praised David more highly than him, had elevated David above him. They had

הָכָה שָׁאוּל בְּאַלְפָיו וַדָּוִד בְּרִבְבוֹתָיו.

for him as usual. Saul had his spear in his hand and he said: "I will pin David to the wall." He threw the spear at him, and David stepped aside and evaded him twice. Saul became afraid of David because the Lord was with him, and had departed from Saul. So Saul removed him from him, and made him captain over a thousand. David had great success in all his ways, and the Lord was with him. When Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in dread of him, but all Israel and Judah loved David.

#### DAVID MARRIES MICHAL

MICHAL, SAUL'S daughter loved David. When they told it to Saul, the thing

pleased him. He said: "I will give her to him to imperil him, that the hand of the Philistines may be upon him." He said to his servants: "Thus shall you say to David: 'The king does not desire any dowry, but to take vengeance on the king's enemies. Let him bring proof that he has killed in battle a hundred of the Philistines.'" Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

The servants of Saul told these words to David, and it pleased David to become the king's son-in-law. So David arose and went with his men and two hundred Philistines were killed. Saul gave him Michal, [11] his daughter, as wife. Michal, Saul's daughter loved David. Saul saw and knew that the

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spoken of Saul without giving him his title of king, so making him the equal of the young shepherd. "He is already called my equal and even my superior," Saul mused, "all he lacks now is my throne."

✎ [11] SAUL GAVE HIM MICHAL: When the Philistines heard that David had married Michal they rejoiced. "Now we can war against Israel and win for it is written in their Torah, 'A bridegroom shall not go out to battle until a year has passed' (Deuteronomy 24:5)." When David heard what the Philistines had said he laughed, because they did not know that the law expounded: "That is true only of wars beyond the borders of Israel. When we are attacked every man must fight, even the groom from under his canopy." The Philistines did attack and David, leading Saul's forces, met and defeated them.

וַיְהִי דָוִד לְכָל דֶּרֶכָיו מַשְׁכִּיל, וַיַּי עָמוּ.

Lord was with David, so he was yet more afraid of him.

#### JONATHAN AND DAVID

JONATHAN LOVED David. The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David. He made a pact with David because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of his robe and gave it to David. Then he gave him his apparel, even his sword, his bow and his belt.

Saul spoke to Jonathan, his son and all his servants to slay David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, who delighted in David told him: "Saul, my father, is plotting to slay you. Now, hide yourself, and I will speak about you to my father, and whatever I will find out I will tell you."

Jonathan spoke favorably of David [12] to his father. He said to him: "Let the king not sin against his servant

David, because he has not sinned against you. He risked his life and killed the Philistine, and the Lord brought a great victory for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced, why then will you sin and shed innocent blood, to kill David without cause?" Saul listened to what Jonathan said, and swore: "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death." Jonathan brought David to Saul, and David remained in his presence as he had before.

#### MICHAL SAVES DAVID'S LIFE

THERE WAS war again, and David went out and fought the Philistines, and defeated them with heavy losses, and they fled before him. Then the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul. He sat in his house with the spear in his hand, and David was playing on the harp. Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but David slipped away. So

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🔗 [12] JONATHAN SPOKE FAVORABLY OF DAVID: Until this point Jonathan's name in Hebrew had been spelled in the brief fashion, *Yonathan*. But when Jonathan speaks to Saul in defense of David, his rival for the throne, the text gives his name as *Y'Honathan*, the first two letters forming the name of the Lord. The Rabbis explained that Jonathan's firm display of affection for David despite his father's hatred and David's threat to his own succession to the throne grew out of Jonathan's profound spiritual attachment to David and thus merited the name of the Lord attached to his.

רָאִיתָ וַתִּשְׂמַח, וְלָמָּה תַּחַטָּא בְּדָם נָקִי לְהַמִּית אֶת דָּוִד חֲנָם.

he drove the spear into the wall, and David fled [13] and escaped.

That night Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, so as to kill him in the morning. Michal said to David: "If you do not save your life tonight, you will be killed tomorrow." So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled. Michal took the teraphim and laid it on the bed. She put a quilt of goat's hair at the head of the bed, and covered it with a cloth.

When Saul sent the messengers to take David, she said to them: "He is

sick." Then Saul sent the messengers again with the command: "Bring him up to me in the bed, so that I may kill him." The messengers brought it, and behold, the teraphim were in the bed. And Saul said to Michal: "Why have you deceived me? You let my enemy escape."

Michal said to Saul: "He said to me: 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'"

David fled and came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth.

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❧ [13] AND DAVID FLED: Our Sages tell us that when the hour behaves impudently toward you, do not try to force it to do your bidding. Give it time and wait. Whosoever has the patience and endurance will find that the hour will eventually fall into his hand. When Nimrod was angry with Abraham and wanted to kill him, Abraham fled—and lived to become father of a great nation. Esau wanted to murder Jacob and Jacob fled until the time came for him to become Israel. So when Saul wanted to kill David, David too fled until the hour when Saul conceded that David would surely reign.

אם אינך ממלט את נפשך הלילה, מחר אתה מומת.



## 14. I SAMUEL [20-25]

### DAVID CONSULTS JONATHAN

DAVID FLED from Naioth and he went and met Jonathan and he said to him: "What have I done? What is my guilt? What wrong have I done to your father that he seeks my life?" Jonathan answered: "Far from it! My father does no thing great or small without letting me know. So why should my father hide this thing from me? No, it is not so!" David said: "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes, so he said to himself: 'Jonathan must not know this because he will be grieved.' But truly, as the Lord lives, there is but a step between me and death."

Jonathan said to him: "What do you wish me to do for you?" David said: "Tomorrow is the festival of the New Moon, when I should sit with the king to eat. So let me go, that I may hide myself until the third day at evening. If your father will miss me, then say: 'David asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem, his city, for it is the yearly sacrifice for the whole family.' If he says, 'Good,' then it will be well with your servant. But if he becomes angry, then you will know that he is determined to harm me." Jonathan said: "If I shall see that my father is determined to harm you, then I shall come and tell it to you." Then David said:

מָה עָשִׂיתִי, מָה עֲוֹנִי וּמָה חָטָאתִי לְפָנֶי אָבִיךָ, כִּי מִבְּקֶשׁ אֶת נַפְשִׁי?



"How will you let me know your father's determination?"

Jonathan said: "You hide yourself at the stone Ezel. Tomorrow at the festival of the New Moon your seat will be empty. On the third day I will come to the place where you hide yourself and I will shoot three arrows, as though I shot at a mark. I will send the boy who will be with me, and if I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you, get them,' then come forward, for all is well with you—there is nothing to fear as the Lord lives. But if I say to the boy, 'The arrows are beyond you,' then go, for the Lord sends you away."

David hid himself in the field.

#### JONATHAN'S PLAN

IT WAS AT the New Moon festival. The king sat down to the meal, and David's place was empty. Nevertheless, Saul did not say anything on that day, for he thought: "Something has befallen David that he could not come." But on the next day, when he saw that David's place was empty again, Saul said to Jonathan: "Why has not come the son of Jesse to the meal; neither yesterday nor today?" Jonathan answered: "David asked leave of me to go to Beth-lehem. He said to me, 'Let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city.' Therefore, he did not come to the king's table."

Saul's anger blazed against Jonathan and he said: "Rebellious son, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your shame and the disgrace of your mother? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now go! Fetch him, for he deserves death." Jonathan answered Saul, his father: "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Saul raised his spear, ready to strike him, so Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. He rose and left the table in anger, and he did not eat bread on the second day of the month, for he grieved for David.

#### JONATHAN KEEPS HIS PROMISE

IT WAS MORNING. Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little boy was with him. He said to the boy: "Run now and find the arrows which I shoot." As the boy ran, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy came to the place of the arrow which Jonathan shot, Jonathan cried after the boy and said: "Is not the arrow beyond you? Quickly, run, do not stop." The boy gathered the arrows and brought them to his master. Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said to him: "Go, carry them to the city." As soon as the boy was gone,

וַיַּעַן יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת שָׁאוּל אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ: לָמָּה יוֹמֵת, מָה עָשָׂה?

David came out from his hiding and fell on his face to the ground and bowed down three times to Jonathan. They kissed one another and wept. Jonathan said to David: "Go in peace. Remember! We two have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying: 'The Lord shall be a witness between me and you and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'"

David arose and departed. Jonathan went into the city.

#### DAVID AND THE PRIEST AHIMELECH

THEN DAVID came to the city of Nob, to Ahimelech, the priest. When Ahimelech saw him, he came eagerly to meet him, and said: "Why are you alone, without attendants?" David said

to Ahimelech: "The king has commanded me to do something and he told me: 'Let no man know anything about the business on which I send you.' The young men who attend me I told to wait in such and such a place. Now, what have you at your hand? Five loaves of bread? Give them to me, or whatever you have."

The priest answered David: "I have no common bread, only the holy bread, [1] the showbread." So the priest gave to David the showbread, the holy bread. Now, one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; his name was Doeg, the Edomite, [2] the chief of Saul's shepherds.

And David said: "Is there a spear here, or a sword?"

And the priest said: "The sword of

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❧ [1] HOLY BREAD: The holy bread or "showbread" consisted of twelve loaves placed on a golden table in the Sanctuary every Sabbath. The loaves were baked on Friday and tradition holds that they were kept miraculously fresh and warm for the entire week. When the week was up, the loaves were replaced on the following Sabbath, and then divided among the priests and eaten.

❧ [2] DOEG, THE EDMITE: Doeg and David were officers of the same rank in Saul's army. As David advanced rapidly, Doeg became jealous. When he reported David's visit to the Sanctuary at Nob, he made it seem that the priests there had been deliberately contemptuous of Saul.

יְיָ יִהְיֶה בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זֶרְעִי וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ עַד עוֹלָם.

Goliath, the Philistine, whom you slew, is here wrapped in a cloth."

And David said: "There is none like it; give it to me!"

#### DAVID FEIGNS MADNESS

DAVID FLED that day in fear of Saul and went to the king of Gath, [which is in the land of the Philistines. When he presented himself to the king,] the servants of Achish, the king of Gath, said to him: "Why, is this not David, the hero of the land? Was it not of him that they sang:

Saul has slain his thousands  
But David his ten thousands?"

When David heard it he was frightened of Achish, the king of Gath. So he pretended to be insane: He ran to and fro. He scribbled on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. Achish looked at him and

said: "Behold, that man is mad! Do I lack madmen here? Who brought him here? He shall not be allowed to come into my house."

#### DAVID IN ADULLAM

DAVID FLED from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And every one who was oppressed or in debt, and every one who was discontented, gathered themselves to him, and he became their captain. There were with him about four hundred men.

Then David went to the king of Moab, and said: "I beg of you, let my father and mother stay with you until I know what God will do for me." And they remained with the king of Moab, all the time that David was in the stronghold. After that, David went to the forest of Hereth.

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Doeg called David not by his name but "the son of Jesse" to point out that David was descended from Ruth the Moabitess and thus not truly an Israelite. Doeg himself was the son of an Edomite mother and what he wanted to stress was that Moabites had been declared ineligible to be accepted into the congregation of Israel.

Tradition has it that a voice was heard saying: "How long will you sin and repeat your false accusations of a taint in David's lineage? All Israelites are of equal lineage in My eyes. The born Israelite and the righteous proselyte, neither is better."

וַיִּתְקַבְּצוּ אֵלָיו כָּל אִישׁ מְצוּק וְכָל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לוֹ נוֹשָׂא וְכָל אִישׁ מֵר נֶפֶשׁ, וַיְהִי עֲלֵיהֶם לְשָׂר.

## SAUL KILLS THE PRIESTS OF NOB

THEN SAUL heard that David became the captain of a band. Saul was sitting under the tamarisk tree in Gibeah on a hill, his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. And Saul said to his servants: "Hear you, Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all captains? Why did you all conspire against me, and there was none who disclosed it to me when my son made a pact with the son of Jesse? Is there not one of you who feels compassion for me? Has my son incited all my servants against me?"

Then Doeg, the Edomite, said: "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, and Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for him; and gave him food, and the sword of Goliath."

The king sent and called Ahimelech, the priest, and all his father's house, all the priests of Nob. They came to him, and the king said to Ahimelech: "Why did you conspire against me, that you have given the son of Jesse food and a sword? You have inquired of God for him, and risen against me as an enemy!"

Ahimelech answered the king: "But who among all your servants is so trusted as David, who is the king's son-in-law? Is it the first time I inquired of God for him? Your servant knew nothing at all about this."

The king said: "You shall surely die, you and your father's house." He said to the guards who stood about him: "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord. They were in league with David. They knew that he was fleeing, and they did not tell me."

But the guards would not lift their hand [3] to fall upon the priests of the

❧ [3] WOULD NOT LIFT THEIR HAND: The Law clearly states that a king must be obeyed by all men. "Anyone who scorns your orders and does not obey you in all you command him, he shall be put to death" (Joshua 1:18). Our Rabbis say that this edict applied not only to Joshua but to all the kings (Sanhedrin 49a). Yet when Saul commanded the guards to kill the priests of Nob, the guards refused and Saul did not have them killed. Was that not open treason and rebellion?

Abner and Amasa were the two commanders and they refused to

וְלֹא אָבוּ עֲבָדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ לְשַׁלַּח אֶת יָדָם לְפָגֹעַ בְּכֹהֲנֵי יְיָ.

Lord. Then the king said to Doeg, the Edomite: "You turn and fall upon the priests."

Doeg fell upon the priests and killed on that day eighty-five men.

And one of the sons of Ahimelech, Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. He told David that Saul killed the Lord's priests. David said: "I am to blame for the death of all your father's house. When I saw Doeg there, I knew that he would tell Saul. Stay with me and fear not. Whoever seeks your life seeks my life."

#### DAVID, NABAL AND ABIGAIL

THERE WAS a man in Maon who was very rich. He had three thousand sheep

and a thousand goats. The name of the man was Nabal, [4] and the name of his wife was Abigail. The woman had good sense and was beautiful; but the man was rough and evil.

David was then in the wilderness of Maon. He heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep. He called ten young men, and said: "Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name: 'Peace be unto you and your house. I have heard that you have men shearing. Now, your shepherds have been with us, and we did not insult them, and nothing of theirs was missing all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore, let my young men find favor in your eyes, and give whatever you

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order the troops to kill the priests. They said: "We cannot execute your order because it is contrary to God's Law. You bestowed upon us insignias of authority and gave us honors. We hereby return them all to you and we will follow the command of the Lord." Even had they done so, the soldiers would not have obeyed because the Torah forbids obeying an unjust order, even from a king. The command to obey the king on punishment of death applies only when the king's command does not transgress the Law of the Torah.

🔥 [4] NABAL: Nabal means *churl*. Why would any parent name a child a churl? Nabal was a stingy man who begrudged even the members of his household food, let alone charity for the poor. His miserliness was so well-known that soon his real name was forgotten and all knew him as Nabal.

וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת שְׂכָל וַיִּפֹּת תָּאֵר, וְהָאִישׁ קָשָׁה וָרַע מֵעֲלָלִים.

have on hand to your servants and to your son David.'"

David's young men spoke all this to Nabal in the name of David. Nabal answered: "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many slaves nowadays who break away from their masters. Shall I then take my bread and my water, the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to the men of whom I know not?"

David's young men left, and returned and told him all this. Then David said: "Let every man gird on his sword." About four hundred men followed David, while two hundred men remained with the baggage. Then David said: "In vain I guarded all that this man has in the wilderness. May God do so to David's enemies if I leave by morning a single male of all that belongs to Nabal."

One of the young men told Abigail: "David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master and he flew at them. His men were good to us. We have not missed anything when we were in the fields. All the while we were tending the sheep, David's men were a wall about us, both by night and by day. Now, therefore, consider what you should do, for there is evil brewing against our master and his house."

Then Abigail hastened and took two hundred loaves of bread; two skins

of wine, five dressed sheep, five measures of parched grain, a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. She loaded them on donkeys, and said to her young men: "You go on before me." But she did not tell her husband.

As she was riding her donkey, and came down the side of the mountain, she met David and his men coming toward her. She hastened and alighted from her donkey; bowed herself to the ground before David, and said: "Let your handmaid speak. Let my lord not take seriously this worthless fellow, Nabal, for he is like his name. 'Churl' is his name, and churlishness is with him. Your handmaid did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. Now, here is the present which your servant has brought to my lord. May it be given to the young men who follow my lord. The Lord will certainly appoint you prince over Israel. Then my lord will not reproach himself for needless bloodshed. Then you shall remember your handmaid."

David said to Abigail: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me. Blessed be you, who has kept me this day from bloodshed."

David accepted the present Abigail brought him, and he said: "Go up to your house in peace."

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחךָ הַיּוֹם לִקְרָאתִי, וּבָרוּךְ טַעֲמֶיךָ וּבְרוּכָה  
אֶתְּ אֲשֶׁר כָּלִיתָנִי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה מִבּוֹא בְדָמִים.

When Abigail came to Nabal, he was holding a feast in his house like the feast of a king, and he was very drunk. She told him nothing until the morning. But in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, she told him all this. His heart died within him, and he became like a stone. About ten days later he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said: "Blessed be the Lord who has avenged my insult [5] from the

hand of Nabal, and kept back His servant from evil."

Then he sent messengers to Abigail, and they said: "David sent us to ask you to be his wife." She arose and bowed, and answered: "Your humble handmaid is ready to wash the feet of my lord's servants." She hastened and mounted a donkey, and five of her maidens followed her. She went after the messengers of David, and became his wife.

❧ [5] AVENGED MY INSULT: David's young men came to Nabal on the day after Samuel's funeral. All Israel still mourned but Nabal gave a party, saying, "God's prophet and still he dies!" Nabal laughed and drank more wine. When David's young men told how they had protected his flocks, Nabal mocked them: "Tell David that Samuel is dead and the oil he poured over David's head is as forgotten as Samuel's life."

When David was told of Nabal's insults he came down with his four hundred armed men, but Abigail and her maidens, bearing gifts, intercepted him. She bowed before David and said: "Forgive the drunken man who prattles in his wine." But David refused, saying: "Nabal denied my anointing and my kingship. By custom, then, he who rebels is denied a trial."

"You are right, my lord," Abigail replied, "but think. When you are king a poor man will ask a rich man for bread. When the rich man refuses him, the poor man will slay him. The rich man's sons will then try to kill the poor man out of revenge and the poor man will come to you for protection. You will say: 'You were wrong to slay the rich man.' The poor man will answer: 'But your Majesty, is that not what you did to Nabal?'"

David hearkened to the wisdom of her words.

בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֲשֶׁר רָב אֶת רִיב חֲרָפְתִּי מִיַּד נָבָל וְאֶת עֲבֹדוֹ חָשַׁף מִרְעָה.



## 15. I SAMUEL [23-31]

### DAVID AND JONATHAN'S COVENANT

IT WAS TOLD Saul that David was come to Keilah. And Saul said: "God has delivered him into my hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that has gates and bars." Saul called all the people to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. David knew that Saul devised mischief against him, and he said: "O Lord, God of Israel, Thy servant has heard that Saul will destroy the city for my sake. O Lord, will the men of Keilah deliver me up into Saul's hand?" And the Lord said: "They will deliver you up." Then David and his

men arose and departed and went wherever they could go.

David abode in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand. Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him: "Fear not; for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find you; and you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you; and that also my father knows." And they two made a covenant before the Lord.

אֶל תִּירָא כִּי לֹא תִמָּצֵאךָ יַד שָׁאוּל אָבִי וְאַתָּה תִּמְלֹךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה  
לְךָ לְמִשְׁנָה, וְגַם שָׁאוּל אָבִי יוֹדֵעַ כֵּן.



## SAUL SPARES DAVID

THE ZIPHITES came to Saul at Gibeah, and said, "David hides himself in the hill of Hachilah." So Saul and his men went to seek David, and they pursued him in the wilderness of Maon. Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side; and David hastened to escape from fear of Saul. Saul and his men surrounded David and his men and were about to take them. But there came a messenger to Saul, saying: "Make haste, and come; for the Philistines have made a raid upon the land." So Saul returned from

following [1] David and went against the Philistines.

## DAVID SPARES SAUL

WHEN SAUL returned from fighting the Philistines, it was told him, "David is in the wilderness of En-gedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men with him to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. He came to the caves which served as shelter for the sheep in bad weather and entered one of the caves to anoint his feet. David and his men were hidden in the innermost parts of the cave. Then David's men said to him: "Here

❧ [1] SAUL RETURNED FROM FOLLOWING: When Saul had David surrounded, a messenger arrived and reported that the Philistines were raiding the land. Saul's officers were divided as to whether to abandon the pursuit of David. Some said, "At last we have David at our mercy. He cannot escape. Let us seize him and once and for all be done with this rebel." But the others replied: "Let us not tarry. The country is in danger and the defense of the land comes first. Eventually David will fall in our hands."

Saul had to decide which course to follow. He was tempted to rid himself of David but he thought: "I am the anointed of the Lord, king of Israel, a shepherd of the Lord's flock. When the flock is in danger does not the shepherd overlook his own needs and desires? Now, I must accept my responsibility for my flock, this people and this land." Again, Saul showed that neither hatred nor revenge would stay him from his kingly duties, and then "Saul returned from following David and went against the Philistines."

מִהֲרָה וְלָכָה כִּי פָשְׁטוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים עַל הָאָרֶץ.

is the day on which the Lord has delivered your enemy into your hand." David said to his men: "The Lord forbid that I do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed." He checked his men with these words and did not let them attack Saul. But David arose quickly and cut off the hem of Saul's robe.

Saul left the cave and went on his way. David left the cave and called out to Saul: "My lord, the king!" Saul looked behind him and David bowed his face to the ground and prostrated himself. Then David said to Saul:

"Why did you listen to the words of the men who said that David seeks your life? You can see that this day the Lord has delivered you into my hand in the cave, but I refused to kill you. Because I said, I will not lift my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed. Yes, my father, look and see the hem of your robe in my hand. Let the Lord judge between me and you. My hand shall not be against you."

When David had finished speaking Saul said to him: "Is this your voice, my son, David?" Saul wept and said to David: "You are more righteous than I, for you have done good to me and I have done evil to you. When the Lord delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. Now I know that you shall surely be king and the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.

So now swear to me by the Lord that you will not kill my children when I am gone and will not destroy my name out of my father's house." And David swore to Saul. And Saul went home and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

#### DAVID AGAIN SPARES SAUL

THE ZIPHITES came once more to Saul at Gibeah, and said "David hides himself in the hill of Hachilah." Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph. He took three thousand chosen men with him to seek David. Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah. David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him in the wilderness, he sent spies, and discovered where Saul was encamped. David arose and came and he saw Saul was lying inside the entrenchment. Abner, the captain of the armies, and all the people lay round about Saul.

Then David said to Ahimelech, the Hittite, and to Abishai, the son of Zeruiah: "Who will go down with me to Saul, to the camp?"

Abishai answered: "I will go down with you." So David and Abishai made their way to the camp by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep within the entrenchment, his spear thrust in the earth at his head.

הַקּוֹלֵךְ זֶה, בְּנֵי דָוִד? ... צִדִּיק אֶתָּה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי אֶתָּה גַּמְלַתְנִי הַטּוֹבָה וְאֲנִי גַמְלָתִיךָ  
הָרָעָה.

Abishai said to David: "God has delivered your enemy into your hand. Let me pin him to the ground with the spear and I will not strike him again!"

David said to Abishai: "Destroy him not. [2] Who can lay his hands on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? His day will come to die or he will be swept away in battle. The Lord forbid that I should raise my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take the spear that is at his head, and the jug of water."

Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of the mountain, and cried out, saying: "Abner, will you not answer?"

Abner answered: "Who are you that cries to waken the king?"

David said to Abner: "You are a valiant man. There is none like you in all Israel. Why then have you not guarded the lord, your king? As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have

not kept watch over your lord. See now, where is the king's spear, and the jug of water that was at his head?"

Saul recognized David's voice, and said: "Is it your voice, my son David?" David answered: "It is my voice, my lord, O king." He continued: "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? What have I done? Of which evil am I guilty? Now therefore, I pray you, let my lord, the king, hear the words of his servant. If it be the Lord that has stirred you up against me, let the Lord accept an offering; but if it be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of the Lord, saying: Go, serve other gods. [3] Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord; for the king of Israel is come out like a partridge to hunt a single flea in the mountains."

🔗 [2] DESTROY HIM NOT: Twice David had chances to kill Saul and did not. The first time was when Saul came alone to the cave and David was so close that he was able to cut off a part of Saul's cloak. The second time David stole into Saul's encampment while the king and his guards slept and stole Saul's spear and waterskin. Both times David's followers wanted to kill Saul. They said: "The law is on your side. The law says clearly: 'If one comes to kill you, forestall him by killing him first.'" The second time, David's lieutenant Abishai actually raised his spear to strike Saul but David warned him: "If you kill him, your blood will be mingled with his."

כִּי יֵצֵא מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת פְּרָעַשׁ אֶחָד כַּאֲשֶׁר יֵרֶדְהָ הַקּוֹרָא בְּהָרִים.

Saul answered: "I have sinned. Return, my son David. I will do you no harm, [4] for my life was precious in your eyes this day. I have acted foolishly and erred."

David answered: "Here is the king's spear! Let one of the young men come and fetch it."

Then Saul said to David: "Blessed be you, my son David. You shall certainly succeed in whatever you undertake."

#### DAVID IN GATH

THEN DAVID said to himself: "Some day I shall be captured by Saul. I had better escape into the land of the Philistines."

David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish, king of Gath. When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he finally gave up his search for him.

#### SAUL AND THE WITCH OF EN-DOR

SAMUEL DIED, and all Israel mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city.

Saul had put out of the land those that divined by ghost and the wizards. The Philistines gathered themselves together and came and encamped in Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel

🔪 [3] GO, SERVE OTHER GODS: Did David worship idols? No. What David meant was that he who leaves the Land of Israel and goes elsewhere it is as if he worshiped idols. David also said that he who is buried in a land other than the Holy Land it is as if he were buried in Babylonia (where the wicked generation inundated by the Flood lived). But he who is buried in the Land of Israel, it is as if he were buried under the altar, for the whole land is worthy of being the site of the Temple; and he who is buried there it is as if he were buried under the Throne of Glory.

🔪 [4] I WILL DO YOU NO HARM: Twice solemnly Saul swore he would not pursue David. But David knew he could not depend on Saul's oath. Not only was Saul by temperament unreliable but Abner, the commander of Saul's army, hated David and intrigued against him. When David showed the piece of cloth he had cut from Saul's robe, Abner said: "David lies. The piece of garment was probably torn off

וַיֵּגֶד לְשָׂאוֹל כִּי בָרַח דָּוִד גֵּת, וְלֹא יָסַף עוֹד לְבָקְשׁוֹ.

together, and they encamped in Gilboa. When Saul saw the hosts of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly. Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him, neither by dreams nor by the prophets. Then Saul said to his servants: "Seek for me a woman who divines by ghost, that I may go to her to inquire of her."

The servants said: "There is a woman in En-dor that divines."

Saul disguised himself, [5] and went, he and two men with him, and came to the woman by night. He said to her: "Divine me, I beg of you, by ghost. Bring up the ghost of him I shall name to you."

The woman answered: "You know that Saul has driven the diviners out of the country. Why then are you laying a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

Saul swore to her, saying: "As the Lord lives, there shall no punishment happen to you for this thing."

The woman said: "Whom shall I bring up to you?" He said: "Bring me up Samuel."

When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice: "Why have you deceived me, for you are Saul!"

The king said to her: "Be not afraid, but what do you see?"

And the woman said: "I see a god-like being coming up out of the earth."

when you marched through the thorn bushes. And even if what David says is true, he did not dare kill you in the cave because we would have come in after him and torn him to pieces." The second time David said, "I have the king's waterskin and spear here. Did Saul also lose these in the thorn bushes?" Abner could say nothing and Saul vowed once more not to pursue him.

❧ [5] SAUL DISGUISED HIMSELF: Tradition tells us that when he went to the sorceress, Saul dressed as a commoner. When he asked the sorceress to divine for him by ghost, the woman was afraid because she knew that Saul had forbidden witchcraft and made it punishable by death. But Saul swore to her by the Lord that no harm would come to her. The Rabbis comment on this inconsistency: Saul, involved in a superstitious practice which was tantamount to denial of the Lord, swears by the Lord's name that nothing will happen to the witch who helps him.

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל שָׁאוּל: אֱלֹהִים רָאִיתִי עֹלִים מִן הָאָרֶץ.

And he said to her: "What does he look like?"

She said: "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." Saul knew that it was Samuel, and bowed with his face to the earth.

Samuel said to Saul: "Why have you disturbed me, [6] to bring me up?"

Saul answered: "I am in grave trouble. The Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me. He answers me no more, by prophets or by

❧ [6] WHY HAVE YOU DISTURBED ME: The dialogue between Samuel and Saul, according to tradition, went like this:

*Samuel*: "Why have you disturbed me and brought me up? Was it not enough for you to anger the Lord by calling up the dead, which is the same as worshiping a graven image, must you make me into idol?"

*Saul*: "The Lord has departed from me and does not answer me by prophets or by dreams. I called you up to tell me what to do."

*Samuel*: "You have given yourself your answer. The Lord has departed from you and become your adversary. I told you that the Lord had resolved to take the kingdom from you and give it to David."

*Saul*: "When you were alive, you did not mention David's name. Why do you speak of him now?"

*Samuel*: "When I was in the world of deceptions (*olam ha-sheker*) I did not tell you the truth exactly because I feared your wrath. You might have killed me or David. But now that I am in the world of truth (*olam ha-emet*) I can tell you the truth because you can do me no harm. What the Lord has done to you, and what He will do, you have deserved. You killed the priests of Nob. Tomorrow a great calamity will befall you."

*Saul*: "Tell me. Do not spare me."

*Samuel*: "The verdict is signed and sealed. Tomorrow the army of Israel will be defeated and you and your sons will be with me."

*Saul*: "Can I save myself?"

*Samuel*: "Yes, by fleeing. If you flee, the army will be defeated but you and your sons will be saved. You must choose."

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל: לָמָּה הִרְגָּזְתָּנִי לְהַעֲלוֹת אוֹתִי?

dreams. [7] Therefore, I have called you, to tell me what I should do.”

Samuel said: “Why do you ask me, when the Lord has departed from you? The Lord has done to you as He spoke by me. The Lord has torn the kingdom from your hand, and has given it to David. The Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me.” [8]

Then Saul fell full length upon the earth. He was very frightened because of what Samuel told him. There was no strength in him, for he had not eaten food all the day, nor all the night.

When the woman saw that he was terrified, she said: “Your handmaid has done what you asked. Now therefore, let me set before you a bit of food. Eat, so that you may have strength when you go your way.”

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Out of fear and hunger Saul stretched full-length on the ground and fainted. The woman revived him and gave him food and drink. When he had eaten, Abner and Amasa, his two chief officers, who he had brought with him, asked what Samuel had prophesied, and Saul answered: “He told me that the army would be victorious and my sons covered with glory.”

🔥 [7] NEITHER BY PROPHETS NOR BY DREAMS: When Samuel asked Saul angrily why Saul had called him back, Saul replied that it was because he had got no response from either prophets or dreams. Why did he not mention that the priestly Urim had also not spoken to him? Our Rabbis tell us that Saul dared not refer to them because he had slain the priests of Nob and still felt remorse for this grievous sin and crime.

🔥 [8] BE WITH ME: Why did Saul go out to battle when he knew it would bring him defeat and death? He might have fled and lived. But Saul did not flee because the disgrace would have been worse than death itself. When Samuel said that, “Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me,” he was not cursing Saul, but comforting him, said Rabbi Johanan. Saul’s death would atone for his sins and thus Saul will be in paradise with Samuel.

וַיִּקְרַע יְיָ אֶת הַמַּמְלָכָה מִיָּדָהּ, וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְרֵעֶהּ לְדָוִד.

He refused. But his servants, together with the woman, urged him until he yielded. He arose from the ground, and sat upon the bed. The woman hastily killed a fatted calf that she had. She took flour, kneaded it and baked unleavened bread. She brought it before Saul and before his servants. They ate and they arose, and went away that same night.

#### THE DEATH OF SAUL

THE PHILISTINES fought against Israel, [9] and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and they fell down wounded and slain on the Mount of Gilboa. The Philistines overtook Saul

and his sons, and they killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. The fighting pressed hard upon Saul. The archers got him in range, and he was badly wounded. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer: "Draw your sword and run me through with it, lest the Philistines come and make sport of me." His armor-bearer refused, because he was much afraid. So Saul took his sword, and fell upon it. When his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell upon his sword, and died with him.

So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer died together. When the men of Israel saw that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities on

At the moment that Saul spoke so to Abner and Amasa, the Lord summoned His angels and said: "Did you recognize the bravery and nobility of this mortal? He might have saved his life by fleeing but he chose instead to go into battle with his army, knowing that he would lose not only his own life, but the lives of his three sons. Saul has determined to do this because he knows that without his leadership the army would suffer even more."

🔥 [9] THE PHILISTINES FOUGHT: When Saul and his sons drew the Israelite forces into battle array and attacked the Philistines, Moses in heaven cried out: "O Lord, see the bravery of these men! They know they will be defeated and die, yet they march out. Lord, have mercy on them and preserve them."

And the Lord replied: "It is not I who decreed their death. It is the priests of Nob who stand before Me in silent accusation."

שְׁלֹף חֶרֶבָה וְדָקְרָנִי בָהּ, פֶּן יָבוֹאוּ הָעֲרָלִים הָאֵלֶּה וְדָקְרוּנִי וְהִתְעַלְלוּ בִּי.



the side of the valley and beyond the Jordan, and they fled. The Philistines came and occupied them.

On the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head, and stripped off his armor, and they put it in the house of Ashtaroth, and fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and marched all night, and took the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and brought them to Jabesh and they burned them. And they took their bones, and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh. And they fasted seven days.

וַיָּקוּמוּ כָּל אִישׁ חֵיִל וַיֵּלְכוּ כָּל הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת גּוֹיֵת שָׁאוּל וְאֶת גּוֹיֹת בָּנָיו  
מִחוֹמַת בֵּית שָׁן.



## 16. II SAMUEL [1-5]

### SAUL AND JONATHAN'S DEATH

DAVID DWELLED in Ziklag. On the third day a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and earth upon his head. When he approached David he fell to the ground and prostrated himself. David said: "Where do you come from?"

He answered: "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." Then David said to him: "Tell me, what happened?"

And he answered: "The people have fled from the battle and many of them have fallen, and also Saul and Jonathan, his son, are dead."

David said to the man: "How do you

know that Saul and Jonathan are dead?"

And the man answered: "I happened, by chance, to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning upon his spear, the chariots and the horsemen pressing hard upon him. He looked behind and saw me and he called out to me and said: 'I beg you kill me, because I am in agony of death. I am going to die, but I am afraid to fall into the hands of the Philistines.' So I killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen [upon his sword]. I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm and I brought them to you, my lord."

וְגַם הָעָם מִן הַמִּלְחָמָה וְגַם הָרֶבֶה נָפַל מִן הָעָם וַיָּמוּתוּ, וְגַם שָׁאוּל וַיְהוֹנָתָן בְּנוֹ מִתּוֹ.

David said to him: "Where do you come from?" And he answered: "I am a son of an Amalekite who lives in Israel." And David said to him: "Why were you not afraid to destroy the Lord's anointed? You are guilty of murder. [1] Your own mouth testified against you." Then David called one of his men and said to him: "Strike him down."

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. They wept and lamented and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and the people of the Lord, because they had fallen by the sword.

#### DAVID'S LAMENT

AND DAVID lamented for Saul and for Jonathan, his son.

"Your beauty, O Israel, upon your  
heights is slain;  
How are the mighty fallen!"

Tell it not in Gath,  
Proclaim it not in the streets of  
Ashkelon,  
Lest the daughters of the  
Philistines rejoice.

You mountains of Gilboa,  
Let there be no dew nor rain  
upon you;  
You fields of death,  
For there the shields of the mighty  
were defiled.

Saul and Jonathan, the lovely and  
the pleasant,  
In their lives and in their death  
they were not separated.  
They were swifter than eagles  
They were stronger than lions.  
You daughters of Israel, weep over  
Saul  
Who clothed you in scarlet, with  
other delights,  
Who put ornaments of gold upon  
your apparel.

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🔥 [1] YOU ARE GUILTY OF MURDER: The Amalekite was deemed guilty of murder though he reported that Saul had begged him to kill him. Our Rabbis explain that the law states clearly: "If a man asks his fellow man: 'Cut off my hand, gouge out my eye, and I will not hold you responsible for the act,' the man who obeys him remains responsible." That man is guilty of a crime and must pay damages. The law clearly forbids injury to anyone. The prohibition is a commandment of the Lord which cannot be countermanded.

הַצְבִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַל בְּמוֹתֶיךָ חָלָל, אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים!

How are the mighty fallen in the  
midst of the battle!

Jonathan upon your heights is  
slain!

I am distressed for you, my brother

Jonathan,

Most pleasant you have been to

me;

Wonderful was your love for me.

How are the mighty fallen,

And the weapons of war perished!"

#### DAVID MADE KING OF JUDAH

AFTER THIS David inquired of the Lord: "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" The Lord said: "Go up." Then David asked: "Whither shall I go?" And He answered: "To Hebron." So David went up there with his wives, and he also took the men who were with him, every man with his household, and they settled in the cities around Hebron. The men of Judah came and they anointed David king [2] over Judah.

#### WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND JUDAH

NOW ABNER, the son of Ner, captain of

Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, to Mahanaim and made him king over all Israel. But the house of Judah followed David. Ish-bosheth was forty years old when he was made king over Israel, and he reigned two years.

Abner and the followers of Ish-bosheth went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab and the followers of David went out from Hebron and met them at the pool of Gibeon. And there was a bitterly fought battle that day. Abner and his followers were beaten by David's followers. [The followers of Ish-bosheth fled before Joab and his men.]

And the three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Asahel was as swift of foot as a gazelle of the field. He pursued Abner and followed him closely. Abner looked behind him and said: "Is it you, Asahel?" He answered: "It is I."

And Abner said: "Turn aside, and seize one of the young men and take his armor for yourself." But Asahel would not turn from following.

Abner said again: "Turn aside. Why should I be forced to smite you to the earth? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?" Still Asahel refused

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🔥 [2] THEY ANOINTED DAVID KING: David wanted to be crowned king in Hebron because from ancient times the city had been hallowed to Jews. In the Cave of Machpelah were buried the Patriarchs and

צַר לִי עָלֶיךָ, אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן, נִעְמָתָ לִי מְאֹד, וְנִפְלְאַתָּה אֶהְבֶּתְךָ לִי.

to turn. Wherefore Abner struck him with a backward thrust of the spear, and Asahel fell dead.

A TRUCE BETWEEN THE ARMIES

JOAB AND ABISHAI pursued Abner. When the sun went down they came to the hill of Ammah. The Benjamites gathered around Abner, and they stood on the top of the hill. Abner called to Joab and said: "Shall the sword devour for ever? Do you not know the end will be bitter? Command your people to stop following their brethren." Joab said: "As God lives, had you not spoken, not one of the men would have stopped pursuing his brethren till morning."

Joab blew the *Shofar* and all the people halted and stopped pursuing Israel.

ABNER NEGOTIATES WITH DAVID

THE WAR BETWEEN the house of Saul and the house of David continued for

a long time. David became stronger and stronger, but the house of Saul became weaker and weaker. And it was in this prolonged war that Abner strengthened himself in the house of Saul. Then Abner sent messengers to David, saying: "Make a covenant with me and I will bring all Israel to you." And he said: "Good. I will make a pact with you, but one thing I require: You shall bring me Michal, the daughter of Saul."

David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, saying: "Deliver to me my wife [3] Michal whom I married." Then Ish-bosheth sent Abner and she was taken from Paltiel, her husband. Her husband went with her, weeping as he followed her to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him: "Go, return." So he returned.

Now Abner came to the elders of Israel and said: "You have long wanted David to be king over you. Now then, do it. For the Lord had promised: 'By the hand of My servant David I will save Israel, My people, from the hand

their wives: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. To be anointed king there would carry the great weight of tradition with the people.

🔗 {3} DELIVER TO ME MY WIFE: Why is Palti abruptly called Paltiel (in I Samuel 25:44 he is called Palti), which includes the name of God? Because, our Sages explain, Palti showed such strength and sensitivity that he deserved to bear the name of God. Michal was

וַיִּקְרָא אַבְנֵר אֶל יוֹאָב וַיֹּאמֶר: הֲלֹנֶצֶחַ תֹּאכֹל חֶרֶב?

of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.’” And Abner also went to speak in the ears of David in Hebron. He came and there were twenty men with him. David made a feast for Abner and his men. Then Abner said: “I will go and gather all Israel to my lord and king, so that they will make a covenant with you, and you shall rule over all of them as you desire.” David sent Abner away, and he went away in peace.

#### THE MURDER OF ABNER

JUST THEN the followers of David and Joab came from a raid. Joab was told: “Abner came to the king, but he sent him off in peace.” Then Joab came to David and said: “What have you done? Abner came to see you; why did you

send him off? Do you not know Abner, that he came to deceive you, to learn your going and coming?”

When Joab left David, he sent messengers after Abner. They brought him back from Bor-sirah, but David did not know it. When he came to Hebron Joab took him aside at the town gate to speak with him quietly, and stabbed him in the groin, and he died.

When David heard it, he said: “I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord of the blood of Abner. Let it fall upon the head of Joab.”

Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him: “Rend your clothes, and gird on sackcloth, and lament before Abner.” King David followed the bier. [4] They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner’s grave and all the people wept.

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a most beautiful woman and forced to marry Paltiel by her father, who was the king. Paltiel and Michal lived in the same house but Paltiel put a sword between himself and Michal to keep him from temptation. In thus recognizing his duty and restraining his passions and governing his *yetzer ha-ra*, Paltiel merited the addition of God’s name to his own.

🔗 [4] KING DAVID FOLLOWED THE BIER: According to the law, a king must not follow the bier. In this case, however, David did so to appease the people. So it is written: “And all the people of Israel understood on that day that the king was not involved in the slaying of Abner.”

קָרְעוּ בְּגֵדֵיכֶם וְחָגְרוּ שָׁקִים וְסָפְדוּ לְפָנַי אֲבִנֶר. וְהִמָּלֵךְ דָּוִד הוֹלֵךְ אַחֲרֵי הַמָּטָה.

David also chanted this lament for Abner:

Must Abner die as a base fool dies?  
Your hands were not bound,  
Your feet were not put in fetters  
As one falls before bandits did you fall.

Then all the people wept afresh for Abner. And afterward all the people came to persuade David to eat some food before the day ended. But David swore, saying: "God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets." So all the people and all Israel were convinced that day that the king had nothing to do with the murder of Abner.

Then the king said to his servant: "You know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day. I am weak and newly anointed king and the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me."

#### KING OVER ALL ISRAEL

THEN ALL the tribes of Israel came to

David at Hebron, and said: "We are of your bone and of your flesh. Even when Saul was king, it was you who led out and brought Israel back. Furthermore, the Lord said to you: 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" So David made a covenant with the elders of Israel in Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.

David was thirty years old when he became king; and he reigned forty years.  
He reigned over Judah in Hebron seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.

#### DAVID CAPTURES JERUSALEM

THE KING and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land. They said to him: "You will never enter here, even if we left only the blind and the lame." [5] Then David said [to his men]: "Whoever goes up to smite the Jebusites and gains the water shaft will be made chief." Joab, the son

❧ [5] THE BLIND AND THE LAME: When Abraham wanted to buy the Cave of Machpelah as a burial-place for Sarah, the people of Heth agreed to let Sarah be buried there for a large sum. However, he had to agree that his descendants would not take over the city of Jerusalem "except by the consent of the children of Jebus." The Jebusites then made copper images which they set up all over their

בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה דָּוִד בִּמְלָכּוֹ; אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה מֶלֶךְ.

of Zeruiah, went up first, and he was made chief.

David captured the stronghold of Zion, [6] and he settled in the city and called it the City of David. [7] And

then he built an encircling wall from Millo and inward.

And Gad came to David and said: "Go, build an altar to the Lord in the threshing floor [8] of Araunah, the Jebu-

city and on each image they inscribed the covenant Abraham had made with their ancestors. And they broke the covenant.

So when the Jebusites now told David that he could not enter the city unless he took away the lame and blind, David understood what they meant. The blind and the lame referred to the copper images which have eyes and see not, feet and walk not, and, as it was said, "That are hated of David's soul."

⚡ [6] DAVID CAPTURED THE STRONGHOLD OF ZION: When Joshua divided the land Jerusalem was not included in the territory of any tribe because the city was still in the hands of the Jebusites. Now that it was to be the capital, to whom would it belong? David declared that it would belong to all of the tribes together and assured that by having all the tribes contribute fifty shekels of gold each so that they could all together buy the city from Ornan (Araunah).

⚡ [7] THE CITY OF DAVID: When David placed the center of worship of the Lord in Jerusalem, he sang: "Let me dwell in Thy tent forever" (Psalms 61:5). The Rabbis ask: "Did David want to live forever?" No, but in his joy, he wished his thanksgiving to endure forever. Then the Lord replied: "Because your joy is for Me and not for you, because you were the first to think of it and because you wished to build My House for My sake and not for your own, even though it shall be your son who will build it, yet will I attribute its building to you."

⚡ [8] THE THRESHING FLOOR: When David came to buy the threshing floor, Ornan, the Jebusite, offered him a yoke of oxen for a burnt-

אָמַר דָּוִד: יְהִי רָצוֹן שְׁיֵהִי שִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבְּחוֹת שְׁלִי בְּאַמְרוֹת לְעוֹלָם.



site." Araunah saw the king and his servants coming to him and bowed down with his face to the ground, saying: "Why does my lord, the king, come to his servant?" And David said: "To buy an altar to the Lord." And so Araunah said: "Let my lord, the king, then take all that seems to be good to him. Behold the oxen for the burnt-offering, and the threshing instruments and the yoke of the oxen for the wood." All this did Araunah give to the king. Then Araunah said to the king: "The Lord your God accept you." And the king said to Araunah: "No, but I will buy it from you at a price, nor will I offer burnt-

offerings to the Lord which cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. David built an altar to the Lord there and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings.

David became greater and greater, for the Lord was with him.

Hiram, king of Tyre, sent messengers to David with cedar trees and carpenters and masons, and they built a house for David. Then David realized that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that the Lord had made his kingdom exalted for the sake of His people Israel.

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offering and the threshing implements to be used as the wood for the sacrificial fire and wheat for the meal-offering. But David refused Ornan's generous offer, saying: "No, but I will buy these things for the full price, for I will not take that which is yours to offer a burnt-offering to the Lord without cost to me." And David paid Ornan for the oxen and the wood and the wheat. So Ornan blessed David as he went up to prepare the sacrifice. Then the people said: "Despise not the blessing of a simple common man, nor even of a gentile, for Ornan's blessing was acceptable to God."

וַיֵּדַע דָּוִד כִּי הִכִּינוּ יְיָ לְמֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכִי נָשָׂא מִמֶּלְכָּתוֹ בְּעֶבֶר עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.



## 17. II SAMUEL [5-12]

### WAR WITH PHILISTINES

WHEN THE Philistines heard that David was anointed king over all Israel, they went up in search of David. When David heard it, he went down to his stronghold, and the Philistines spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. Then David inquired of the Lord: "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt Thou deliver them into my hand?" And the Lord said to David: "Go up, for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into your hand."

David came to Baal-perazim and defeated them there. The Philistines left

there their idols, and David and his men burned them with fire.

### DAVID'S COMPASSION

WHEN THE armies of the Philistines were in the valley of Rephaim, David at that time was in the stronghold at the cave of Adullam. A garrison of Philistines occupied Beth-lehem. Then David said longingly: "Oh, that some one would give me a drink of water from the well of Beth-lehem, that is by the gate." Three of his stalwarts broke through the Philistine lines, and drew water from the well at Beth-lehem and brought it

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֵל דָּוִד: עֲלֵה, כִּי נָתַתִּיךָ אֶת הַפְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּיָדְךָ.

to David. But David refused to drink it and he said: "The Lord forbid that I should. Am I to drink the blood of these men? For at the risk of their lives they have brought the water." And he poured it out for the Lord.

#### DAVID'S WARS

DAVID DEFEATED the Philistines and subdued them. He took Metheg-ammah from the hands of the Philistines. He defeated Moab, and the Moabites became subject to him, and paid him tribute. He also defeated the king of Zoba when he attempted to establish his dominion over the River. When the Aramean of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, king of Zoba, David defeated him and put a garrison in Aram of Damascus. The Arameans became subject to David, and paid tribute to him. David put a garrison in Edom, and the Edomites paid tribute to him. He dedicated to the Lord all the

silver and gold that he had captured from Aram, Moab, the Philistines and Amalek.

The Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. David was king over all Israel, and he administered justice, righteousness for all his people. [1]

#### THE ARK IS BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM

DAVID BUILT for himself houses in Jerusalem, and he prepared a place for the Ark of God. Then David gathered all the chosen men of Israel and David arose and went with all the people to bring up the Ark of God, the Lord of hosts. They brought the Ark to the City of David. And David danced before the Lord with all his might, and he was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the *Shofar*.

And it was when the Ark of the Lord

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❧ [1] HE ADMINISTERED JUSTICE, RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR ALL HIS PEOPLE: The original Hebrew says, "He did what is just and charitable," and our Rabbis inquired, "How can those two terms be reconciled? If it is just, according to strict law, it is not charitable; if it is charitable, then it cannot be just, because it is not decided according to strict law."

The Sages comment that this verse means that David employed arbitration, which contains both justice and charity, as his method of judgment, telling the people who came to him that they must compromise their differences.

וְדָוִד מְכַרְכֵּר בְּכָל עֹז לְפָנָיו יי, וְדָוִד חָגוּר אֶפֶסֶד בְּד.

came into the city, that Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked out of the window, and she saw King David whirling and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. They brought the Ark of the Lord, and set it in its place within the tent that David pitched for it. Then David offered sacrifices to the Lord. And he blessed the people in the name of the Lord, and distributed to all the people, both to men and women, to every one a loaf of bread, a portion of meat and a sweet cake. So the people departed each to his home.

David went home to bless his household. Michal came to meet David, and she said to him: "How dignified was the king of Israel today as he stripped himself before the eyes of the handmaids of

his servant! You bared yourself [2] as a common fellow shamelessly uncovers himself."

David said to Michal: "It is before the Lord who chose me rather than your father, or any of his house, to appoint me prince over Israel, that I danced. As to the maidservants, I shall be held in honor by them."

#### DAVID'S KINDNESS

AND DAVID said: "Is there anyone left [3] of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for the sake of Jonathan?" Now there was a servant in the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David. And David said: "Is there still someone left of the house

🔗 [2] YOU BARED YOURSELF: Michal railed at David when she saw him dancing before the multitude bared. She berated him for having behaved like a common lout and told him that her father and brothers had conducted themselves with more modesty and regal dignity. Then David replied: "Your family was always concerned with their own dignity and honor. I am more concerned with the honor and praise of the Lord than with what men may say about me."

🔗 [3] IS THERE ANYONE LEFT? The commentators ask: "Did not David know how many children Saul and Jonathan had? Did he not also know that only three of Saul's sons were killed on Mount Gilboa?" The Rabbis explain that David knew the children of Saul were living but he did not know where they were. Because in those days kings customarily killed the descendants of the old dynasty, Saul's children had gone into hiding. But David inquired after them and

לְפָנַי יְיָ אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בִּי מֵאֲבִיךָ וּמִכָּל בֵּיתוֹ לְצִוּוֹת אוֹתִי נָגִיד עַל עַם יְיָ, עַל  
יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְשִׁחַקְתִּי לְפָנַי יְיָ.

of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?" Ziba answered: "Jonathan left a son and he is lame in his feet. When he was five years old, the news came of Saul's and Jonathan's deaths. His nurse took him up and fled. But as she hurried he fell and became lame. His name is Mephibosheth."

David said to Ziba: "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king: "He is in Lo-debar."

Then King David sent for him, and Mephibosheth came to David and prostrated himself. And David said: "Fear not, for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of Jonathan, your father." Then he called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him: "I give to your master's son the entire estate of Saul. And you and

your sons and your servants shall till the land for him, but Mephibosheth shall sit at my table."

Then Ziba said to the king: "As my lord, the king, commanded his servant, so shall your servant do." Mephibosheth remained in Jerusalem, and ate regularly at the king's table.

#### DAVID'S SIN WITH BATH-SHEBA

NOW AT THE return of the spring, at the time when kings go forth to battle, David sent Joab with the whole army of Israel, and they besieged Rabbah. David remained in Jerusalem. [4] One day at sunset David walked upon the roof of the king's house, and he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beauti-

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declared: "They should be told that no harm will befall them," so that all would know he intended no harm to any member of Saul's household.

✎ [4] DAVID REMAINED IN JERUSALEM: When the country was at last at peace and Jerusalem established David spent his days governing and meting out justice. At night, exhausted from the labors of his day, he would fall asleep worn out. But at midnight his harp, which hung over his bed, would resound with the night breezes and fill his room with music. Then David would arise, go to the roof of the palace with his harp, and there survey the beautiful night skies of Jerusalem. Words of praise would spring to his lips and melodies from his lyre and all through the night he would chant the praises of the Lord.

כְּנֹר הָיָה תְּלוּי לְמַעַלָּה מִמִּטָּתוֹ שֶׁל דָּוִד. כִּיּוֹן שֶׁהָגִיעַ חַצוֹת לַיְלָה – הָיְתָה מְנַשֶּׁבֶת רוּחַ צְפוֹנִית וְהָיָה מִגִּן מֵאֲלֵיו.

ful. David sent and inquired about the woman. He was told: "Is she not Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite?" David sent messengers, and took her to the king's house. Then he wrote a letter to Joab: "Put Uriah in the forefront on the hottest fighting, then draw back from him, that he may be struck down and die."

When Joab assigned the watch of the siege, he put Uriah [5] at a place where he knew the valiant troops were. When the men of the city went out and fought with Joab, some of the men fell, and Uriah died also.

Then Joab sent and told David all concerning the war, and he said to the

messenger: "If King David will become angry and ask: 'Why did you go so near the wall?' then you shall say: 'Also Uriah, the Hittite, is dead.'" The messenger came and told David all that Joab charged him to say.

Thereupon David said: "Tell Joab, let not this thing depress you, for in one manner or another, the sword devours. Strengthen your attack upon the city and overthrow it."

Now when the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she lamented for her husband. When the mourning period was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, [6] and she bore him a son. But

❧ [5] HE PUT URIAH: Why did Joab do David's bidding and deliberately send a valiant fellow-officer to his death? And why wasn't Joab punished for such treachery to Uriah?

Some Rabbis maintained that Uriah merited his death for disobeying his king. David had told him to "go down to your house and wash your feet," but instead Uriah had stayed at the king's palace. When David on the morrow asks why he did not go, Uriah speaks of "my lord Joab and the servants of my lord." In naming Joab lord before David and the soldiers servants of Joab, he was committing treason. Joab did not know what had happened in Jerusalem, but when Uriah brought him the note from David he was led to understand that Uriah had rebelled against the king and was thus being sentenced to death to avoid public notice.

❧ [6] AND SHE BECAME HIS WIFE: The Rabbis explain that David was not forbidden to Bath-sheba. Like all soldiers of the court Uriah had

הָבּוּ אֶת אִוְרִיָּה אֶל מֶלֶךְ דָּוִד וְשָׁבָתָם מֵאַחֲרָיו וְנָפְחָה וְמָתָה.

the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

#### THE PROPHET'S REBUKE

THE LORD sent Nathan to David, and he came to him and said: "There were two men in a city, one rich, the other poor. The rich man owned very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had

nothing but a single ewe lamb. He fed it and it grew up with his children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup, nestle in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him.

"Then a traveler came [7] to visit the rich man, but he spared his own sheep and cattle. He took the poor man's lamb, and prepared it for the man who came to him."

given Bath-sheba a divorce when he went off to battle lest she become an *agunah*. An *agunah* was a woman whose husband had deserted her, or had gone off on a journey or to battle, and had never returned. With no witnesses to confirm his death, his widow must then remain alone awaiting his return. If the man never returns, the woman must remain a widow and not remarry to her dying day. Thus, because Bath-sheba was given a divorce by Uriah, she was free to go to David even before Uriah's death.

🔗 [7] THEN A TRAVELER CAME: The Talmud pointed out that Nathan was doing far more than showing David that he had sinned with Bath-sheba. Nathan was reminding the king that sin grows until it fills the whole heart and mind.

Rava observed that first the evil inclination is called a "passerby"; then it is called a "guest"; and finally it is called an "occupant of the house." Why is the *yetzer ha-ra* referred to in this way? Because the soul which is holy, dwells in the body, which is the house of the soul. When the person admits the evil inclination, at first it is like a wayfarer who can shortly be sent on his way. But as the *yetzer ha-ra* remains it is like a household guest who acquires certain privileges. And soon the guest takes over and becomes the man, driving out the original soul which dwelt there and so becoming master of the house.

לְעֹשֶׂיר הָיָה צֹאן וּבָקָר הָרֶבֶה מְאֹד, וְלָרֵשׁ אֵין כָּל כִּי אִם כְּבִשָּׁה אַחַת קִטְנָה.

David's anger blazed furiously, and he said to Nathan: "As the Lord lives, the man who has done it deserves to die, because he had no pity. He shall restore the lamb fourfold."

Then Nathan said to David: "You are the man! Thus said the Lord: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah.' Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing that which is evil in His eyes? You have slain Uriah, and you have taken his wife. Now, thus said the Lord: 'The sword shall never depart from your house.'"

David said to Nathan: "I have sinned [8] against the Lord."

Nathan said to David: "You shall not die. Nevertheless, because you have openly spurned the Lord by this deed, I will let your sin be known to all. You did it secretly, but I will do it before all the eyes of Israel. I will raise up evil

against you out of your own household. The child that will be born to you shall die!" And Nathan departed.

#### THE CHILD DIES

THE CHILD that the wife of Uriah bore to David became very sick. David prayed to the Lord in behalf of the child, he fasted, and lay on the earth in sackcloth before the Lord. The elders of his house came and stood over him to raise him from the earth, but he would not get up nor eat with them. On the seventh day the child died. The servants of David feared to tell him for they said: "While the child was alive we spoke to him and he did not listen to us, how can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do himself some harm."

When David saw that his servants were whispering together, he understood. He said to his servants: "Is the child dead?" They said: "Dead." Thereupon David arose from the earth and

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🔪 [8] I HAVE SINNED: When Nathan left, David realized how great was his sin and he begged God's forgiveness. He prayed and pleaded, but the Lord would not listen to him. Finally David cried out: "O Lord, if only You will forgive me, Israel may learn from my example. They will see that if a man turns to You with all his heart in full atonement, You will pardon him, for even David, that grave sinner, was forgiven." And then God heeded his words and gave ear to his plea.

וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל דָּוִד: אַתָּה הָאִישׁ!



bathed, anointed himself, changed his garments, went to the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house and told the servants to set bread before him, and he ate.

The servants said to him: "What is the meaning of the thing that you have done? You have fasted and wept for the child while it was alive, but when the child died you arose, bathed, changed your garments, and have eaten food?"

David answered: "While the child

was still alive I fasted and wept, for I said: 'Who knows, the Lord might have mercy and the child may live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

David comforted Bath-sheba, his wife, and she bore him a son, and he called his name Solomon. The Lord loved him, and He sent a message through Nathan, the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah, "the beloved of the Lord."

וַיְנַחֵם דָּוִד אֶת בַּת-שֶׁבַע אִשְׁתּוֹ ... וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ שְׁלֹמֹה.



## 18. II SAMUEL [14-17]

### ABSALOM SEEKS SUPPORT

ABSALOM, WHOSE mother was Maacah, was born to David in Hebron. In all Israel there was no man so much praised for his beauty as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. At the end of every year he would cut his hair, as it was heavy on him; it weighed two hundred shekels by the king's weight. Absalom had chariots and horses, and

fifty men to run before him. He would rise early and stand at the gate of the city. When any man had a suit to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call him and ask him: "Of what city are you?"

The man answered: "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." Absalom said to him: "Your cause is good and right, but the king has not appointed any man to hear you. Oh, that I were made judge [1] in the land, that

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[1] THAT I WERE MADE JUDGE: David had proved himself to be a particularly good judge, why therefore does Absalom make such a point of being a good judge?

וְכִאֲבִשָׁלוֹם לֹא הָיָה אִישׁ יָפֶה בְּכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהִלָּל מָאֵד.

any man who had a suit or cause might come to me. I would see that he received justice." Also, when a man came near to prostrate himself, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. In this manner Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

#### BEGINNING OF THE REVOLT

IT WAS SOME time later that Absalom

said to the king: "Let me go to Hebron [2] and pay my vow, that I have vowed to the Lord." The king said to him: "Go in peace." So he arose and went. He sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying: "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, you shall say: 'Absalom reigns in Hebron.'" With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who went in all innocence for they were invited as guests,

David was so busy with so many things, government, military preparations, the Tabernacle, his own studies and writing that he could not hear even a few cases each day. So he arranged court days each month and all the litigants were heard then, but they all had to wait for those days. Absalom promised instant justice, which appealed to the common people for, as the saying has it, "Justice delayed is not justice."

✎ [2] LET ME GO TO HEBRON: Absalom deceived both David and the elders of Israel. Absalom came to David, saying: "Father, I want to go to Hebron to bring fat sheep from there to sacrifice to God. Please give me a letter empowering me to select two elders to accompany me." David asked if he wanted any man in particular and Absalom replied, "No, just empower me to select any two."

With that document Absalom went from city to city and in each showed the two most prominent men in the town the letter, saying: "My father empowered me to select any two men and I chose you because I have particular affection for you." In that fashion Absalom succeeded in gathering around him the heads of two hundred councils who knew nothing of his conspiracy with Ahithophel. When the elders discovered the plan for the rebellion, they gave only half-hearted assent to it. And they prayed: "O Lord, hear our prayer.

כְּשֶׁמַעְצֶכֶם אֶת קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר וְאַמְרָתָם: מֶלֶךְ אֲבִשְׁלוֹם בְּחֶבְרוֹן.

and were not aware of any plot. Before Absalom offered the sacrifice, he sent for Ahithophel, [3] David's counselor. Ahithophel came and the conspiracy became strong as the people who joined Absalom increased.

Then a messenger came to David and said: "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." David said to the men who were with him: "Arise and let us flee. Make speed lest Absalom overtake us quickly and bring calamity upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword."

The king left the city on foot, and he stopped at the last house of the city. All

the countryside wept in a loud voice as the people passed by. Then the king came and stood in the river bed of Kidron, and all the people passed before him, toward the way of the wilderness. And, behold, among the people were the priests Zadok and Abiathar and all the Levites bearing the Ark of the Covenant of God. They set down the Ark until all the people had passed out of the city. Then the king said to Zadok: "Carry back the Ark of God into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back, and He will let me see the Ark and its abode. But if He will say: 'I have no delight

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May we fall into the hands of David, for he will be merciful. Only let not King David fall into our hands, because Absalom and Ahithophel will show him no mercy."

🔗 [3] AHITHOPHEL, THE GILONITE: Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bath-sheba. He was a great scholar, the most prominent courtier of David's retinue, and David's most intimate friend. Whenever David had a question of law he consulted Ahithophel and whatever Ahithophel's decision the assembly of elders abided by it.

But Ahithophel lacked true piety. He thought that his wisdom and learning made him best suited to be king of Israel. He enticed Absalom to rebel against his father and to violate David's wives. Ahithophel hoped to have Absalom defeat David's followers and then to kill his father. Ahithophel then planned to bring Absalom to judgment before the council of elders, holding Absalom to account and condemning him to death for his crimes. Then he, Ahithophel, the great sage, would be anointed king of Israel.

וַיָּבֹא הַמַּגִּיד אֶל דָּוִד לֵאמֹר: הֲיָה לִּב אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרַי אֲבִשָּׁלוֹם.

in you,' let Him do to me whatever He wills." Zadok and Abiathar carried the Ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.

#### HUSHAI SENT TO OPPOSE AHITHOPHEL

THEN DAVID was told that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom. David said: "O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." When David came to the top of the mountain, [4] Hushai, the Archite, came to meet him, his garment rent and earth upon his head. David said to him: "If you go with me, you will be a burden. But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom: 'I will be your servant, O king, as I have been

your father's servant,' then you will help me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. There will also be with you Zadok and Abiathar, the priests. They have with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son. By them you shall send me everything which you shall hear."

Hushai, David's friend, returned to the city. David and all the people with him came to Bahurim weary and stopped there to rest. Absalom and all the people of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him.

#### SHIMEI CURSES DAVID

WHEN DAVID came to Bahurim, behold, there came a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei,

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☞ [4] TO THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN: When David looked around him and saw that his courtiers and officers kept their places around him according to their rank, as if they were all still in the palace of Jerusalem, and that all his friends had remained loyal to him and still considered him king, he forgot his grief and self-pity. He saw it as a sign that the Lord had not deserted him and he burst into a song of joy. It was a new psalm which began: "A song of David when he fled from Absalom, his son:

"Lord, how many are my adversaries  
Many are they that rise against me.  
Many that are, that say of my soul:  
'There is no salvation for him in God.'  
But Thou, O Lord, art my shield above me,  
My glory, and the lifter up of my head" (Psalms 3:1-4).

וְאַתָּה יְיָ מִגֵּן בְּעָדִי, כְּבוֹדִי וּמִרְיָם רִאשִׁי.

the son of Gera; he came out, and kept on cursing as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed: "Begone, begone, you man of blood, and base fellow; the Lord has returned on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead you have ruled; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom, your son; and, behold, you are undone by your own mischief, because you are a man of blood."

Then Abishai, the son of Zeruiah,

said to the king: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Let me go, I pray you, and take off his head." And the king said: "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him: Curse David; [5] who then shall say: Why have you done so?"

David said to Abishai and all his servants: "My son, who came out of my body, seeks my life; how much more this Benjamite now? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bid him curse. It may be that the Lord will requite me [6] good for his cursing of me this day." So David and his men went

❧ [5] CURSE DAVID: How is it that David says the Lord told Shimei to curse him? The Sages said that David had told Abishai: God has given Shimei room to curse me, for look at my condition. Were I still monarch in Jerusalem, would he dare to open his mouth? But like many men, God gives them *pithon peh* (permission to speak) and they speak far more than God intended and so earn God's enmity and man's.

And David added: "Let God see that despite Shimei's false charges and cursing I seek no revenge; and so it may be to my credit in these dire straits."

❧ [6] THE LORD WILL REQUITE ME: Why did God allow David to sin? David was His own anointed, the man who welded God's own people together. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said that it was part of God's plan, just as He allowed the Hebrews fresh from Sinai to sin with the golden calf. Each sin was an opening to repentance. Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai said: David was not suited for his sin; the Israelites were not suited for their sin. Why then did they occur?

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ: מָה לִּי וְלָכֶם בְּנֵי צְרוּיָה? כֹּה יִקְלֹל כִּי יִי אָמַר לוֹ: קִלְלֵ אֶת דָּוִד, וּמִי יֹאמַר: מִדּוֹעַ עָשִׂיתָה כֵּן?

their way; and Shimei went along on the hillside and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

#### HUSHAI COMES TO ABSALOM

WHEN HUSHAI, David's friend, came to Absalom, he called out: "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

Absalom said to him: "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?"

Hushai answered: "I am for the man whom the Lord and Israel have chosen; his will I be. Again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I served your father, so will I serve you."

#### AHITHOPHEL'S PLAN

THE COUNSEL of Ahithophel which he gave in those days was as if one inquired the word of God. So was all the advice of Ahithophel considered by David and by Absalom. Now Absalom said to Ahithophel: "Give us counsel, what shall we do?"

Ahithophel said: "Let me now choose

twelve thousand men, and I will pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged. And him and all the people with him I will throw in a panic. I will strike down the king alone, and I will bring back all the people to you, and the people will be at peace." The plan pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel. But Absalom said: "Call now Hushai, the Archite: let us also hear what he has to say."

When Hushai came Absalom said to him: "This is what Ahithophel said. Shall we listen to him? If not, speak out yourself."

And Hushai said: "The counsel that Ahithophel has given this time is not good. You know your father and his men; they are mighty warriors. They are embittered as a bear in the field robbed of her cubs. Your father is a man of war. He will not lodge with the people. He has hidden himself in some pit, or in some other place. When some of the attacking men will fall, whoever hears the report will say: 'There has been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.' Then the most coura-

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So that in the future if the community or an individual should sin, he could see that the Hebrews right after Sinai, and David, after he had established his glory, had sinned likewise. So, whether a sin is private or public—David's was private, Israel's was public—or an individual or communal sin, repentance sincerely offered will be accepted and the sin forgiven.

אַתָּה יִדְעָתָּ אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אֲנָשָׁיו כִּי גִבּוֹרִים הֵמָּה, וּמָרִי נֶפֶשׁ הֵמָּה כְּדֹב שָׂכּוּל  
בַּשָּׂדֶה.

geous man, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt.

"Therefore, I counsel that all Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, shall be gathered, as many as the sands by the sea, and you yourself lead them in battle. So you will come upon him, and we will fall upon him [and the men who are with him] as dew falls on the ground; and of him and all the men who are with him not one shall be left. If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and will drag it into the river until not even a single pebble can be found there."

Then Absalom and all Israel said: "The counsel of Hushai, the Archite, is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." The Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that He might bring evil upon Absalom.

#### HUSHAI WARNS DAVID

THEN HUSHAI told the priests Zadok and Abiathar: "Ahithophel gave such and such advice to Absalom. Therefore send quickly and tell David not to camp tonight at the fords of the wilderness, but to cross the Jordan lest he be destroyed and all those with him."

Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the sons of Zadak and Abiathar, stayed outside the city, and a maidservant was sent to them with the message, and they went to tell King David. But a lad saw them and told Absalom. Both of them went quickly and came to the house of a man in Bahurim who had a well in his court, and they hid down there. The woman spread a cloth over the mouth of the well, and spread groats upon it. When Absalom's men came to the woman's house, they said: "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"

She said: "They have crossed the brook." So when they looked for them and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.

After they were gone, Ahimaaz and Jonathan came up out of the well, and went and told King David: "Pass quickly over the water, for thus has Ahithophel counseled against you." David arose, and all the people who were with him, and they crossed the Jordan.

When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went home to his city. He gave instructions to his household, and then he hanged himself. He was buried in the burial-place of his father.

וּבָאוּ אֵלָיו בְּאַחַד הַמְּקוֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא שָׁם וַיַּחַנו עָלָיו כְּאֲשֶׁר יָפַל הַטֵּל עַל  
הָאֲדָמָה.





## 19. II SAMUEL [17-24]

### ABSALOM DEFEATED

DAVID CAME to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. Absalom had set Amasa in command of all of the army in place of Joab. So Absalom and Israel encamped in the land of Gilead.

David mustered the people who were with him, and appointed captains of thousands and captains of hundreds. Then he divided the people: one third he put under the command of Joab; another third under the command of Abishai, Joab's nephew; and another

third under the command of Ittai, the Gittite. The king said to the people: "I also will go with you."

But the people said: "You shall not go with us, because if we run away, or if even half of us die, no one will care. But you are worth ten thousand of us." The important thing is for you to be ready to help us from the city."

The king said to them: "Whatever seems good in your eyes I will do."

So the king stood at the side of the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands. The king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying: "Deal gently for my sake with

לֹא תֵצֵא, כִּי אִם נָוֶס נָוֶס לֹא יֵשִׁימוּ אֵלָינוּ לֵב, וְאִם יָמוּתוּ חֲצֵינוּ לֹא יֵשִׁימוּ אֵלָינוּ לֵב, כִּי עֲתָה כְּמוֹנוּ עֲשֶׂה אֲלֵפִים.

the lad Absalom." All the people heard when the king gave charge to all the captains concerning Absalom.

The people took to the field against Israel, and the battle was in the forest. And the forest that day devoured more people than the sword. The people of Israel were defeated by the followers of David. Absalom chanced to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head was caught fast in the branches; the mule under him passed on, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth. A man saw it and told Joab: "I saw Absalom hanging under an oak."

Joab said: "You saw him; why did you not kill him? I would have given you ten [shekels of] silver and a belt."

The man answered: "Even if I felt in my hand a thousand, I would not lay a hand on the king's son. We all heard the king charge you and Abishai and Ittai: 'Deal gently with the lad Absalom.'"

Joab said: "I have no time to waste with you." He took three darts and thrust them into the body of Absalom. The ten young men who bore Joab's armor surrounded Absalom and killed him. They took the body of Absalom and cast it into a great pit in the forest. Then Joab blew the *Shofar*, and the people stopped pursuing Israel. All Israel fled away, every one to his home.

כִּי בְּאַזְנוֹיָנוּ צִוָּה הַמֶּלֶךְ אוֹתָךְ וְאַתְּ אֲבִישִׁי וְאַתְּ אֶתִּי לֵאמֹר, שְׁמְרוּ-מִי בְּנֵעַר,  
בְּאַבְשָׁלוֹם.

#### THE NEWS OF ABSALOM'S DEATH

NOW AHIMAAZ said: "Let me run now and bring the news to the king, that the Lord avenged him of his enemies." Joab said: "You are not to carry tidings to-day; you shall not do so, for the king's son is dead." Then Joab said to the Cushite: "Go and tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed to Joab and ran.

Then Ahimaaz said again: "Come what may, do let me run after the Cushite." Joab said: "Why is it that you desire to run, my son? You will not be rewarded for the news you bring." But Ahimaaz said: "Come what may, let me run." So Joab said: "Run." Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain [of the Jordan], and he overtook the Cushite.

David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman had gone up on the roof of the gate. When he looked he saw a man running alone. The watchman called and told the king, and the king said: "If he is alone, there are tidings in his mouth." Then the watchman saw another man running. He called: "I see another man running alone." The king said: "He is also bringing good tidings."

Then the watchman said: "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz."

The king said: "He is a good man, he comes with good news." Ahimaaz came near the king and said: "All is well." Then he bowed and said: "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered up the men who raised up their hand against the king."

The king said: "Is it well with the lad Absalom?" Ahimaaz said: "When Joab sent me, I saw a great tumult and I did not know what it was."

Then the Cushite came, and said: "Tidings for my lord, the king, for the Lord has avenged you this day from all those who are against you."

The king said to the Cushite: "Is it well with the lad Absalom?" The Cushite answered: "Let all the enemies of the lord, the king and all who rise against you for evil, be as the young man is."

#### DAVID'S GRIEF

THE KING was much moved and as he went up to the chamber over the gate,

he wept and cried: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would I had died for you O Absalom, my son, my son." [1]

The victory of that day turned into mourning for all the people, since they heard that the king was grieving for his son. The people slipped into the city stealthily, like people ashamed when they flee in battle.

The king cried in a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son." Joab came into the house of the king and said: "You have shamed this day all your followers who have saved your life and the lives of your sons, your daughters, and the lives of your wives, for you love your enemies and hate those who love you. You have declared today that all the princes and your followers are nothing to you. For now I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us dead today, you would be well pleased. Now arise and go out, and speak to the people. I swear by the Lord,

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[1] ABSALOM, ABSALOM: David was not only calling his son Absalom's name. *Av shalom* means Father of Peace and David was also calling on God, praying: If I have found favor in Your sight, O Father of Peace, have mercy on my son Absalom's soul.

Why is "my son" repeated eight times? Seven times to raise Absalom from the seven divisions of Gehenna; and, as for the last, some say to unite Absalom's severed head to his body and others say to bring him into the World to Come.

בְּנֵי אֲבִשָּׁלוֹם, בְּנֵי בְנֵי אֲבִשָּׁלוֹם, מִי יִתֵּן מוֹתִי אֲנִי תַחְתִּידָה, אֲבִשָּׁלוֹם, בְּנֵי בְנֵי.

if you do not go out and speak, not a man will be left with you tonight."

The king arose and sat at the gate. When all the people were told: "The king is sitting at the gate," all of them came to greet the king.

#### DAVID RETURNS

SO THE KING returned and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring him over the Jordan. Shimei, the son of Gera, [2] came down to meet King David with a thousand men of Benjamin. Shimei fell down before the king, when he would go over the Jordan. And he said: "Let not my lord hold me

guilty, neither should you remember that which I did evilly the day that the king went out of Jerusalem. For your servant knows that he has sinned; therefore, I have come this day the first of the house of Joseph to meet my lord, the king."

But Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, answered and said: "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this because he cursed the Lord's anointed?"

David said: "Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel?" And the king said to Shimei: "You shall not die." And the king swore it.

Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king. And the king

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🔗 [2] SHIMEI, THE SON OF GERA: After Absalom's death, the people were concerned to see if King David would forgive those who had followed after the rebel. But none dared approach David until Shimei ben Gera came and knelt before the king. All were astonished because it was Shimei who had cursed David and stoned him as he fled. Then Shimei said: "My lord, even Joseph's brothers, his own flesh and blood, were forgiven after they wronged him. Joseph treated them with kindness and generosity and forgave them. Therefore, O king, forgive my sins against you. I deserve no forgiveness, I know, but the people will say: 'None deserved punishment more than Shimei, for his crimes were the worst, yet King David forgave him.' So let this be a sign to all Israel that you will forgive your people for their sins."

And David replied: "So be it. I have forgiven as you asked."

And because David forgave him, Mordecai was born out of the seed of Shimei and called by his name.

וְלְכָל הָעָם הִגִּידוּ לֵאמֹר: הִנֵּה הַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב בְּשֹׁעַר. וַיָּבֹא כָל הָעָם לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ.

said to him: "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" He answered: "My lord, my servant deceived me. For your servant said: I will saddle a donkey that I may ride on it and go with the king for I am lame. And he has slandered me to my lord, the king; but my lord, the king is as an angel of God. Do therefore what is good in your eyes." And he said: "For all my father's house were deserving of death at the hand of my lord, the king; yet you set your servant among those who ate at your own table. What right therefore have I yet? Or why should I cry any more to the king?"

And the king said: "Why do you

speaking of these matters any more? I say: You and Ziba divide the field." [3]

Mephibosheth said: "Let him take all, for since my lord, the king, is come in peace into his own house."

#### ABISHAI SAVES DAVID

THE PHILISTINES had war with Israel again; and David went down and fought against the Philistines; and David waxed faint. [4] Ishbi-benob, who was of the sons of the giant, thought to have slain David. But Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, saved him and killed the Philistine. Then the men of David said: "You shall

✎ [3] **DIVIDE THE FIELD:** Rather than take the time and energy to discover the truth, David impatiently told Mephibosheth and Ziba to divide the land themselves. This was neither judgment nor just. So the Talmud states that when David said, "You and Ziba divide the field," a Heavenly Voice called out: "Rehoboam and Jeroboam shall thus divide your kingdom!"

✎ [4] **AND DAVID WAXED FAINT:** All through the hot day David and his warriors fought the Philistine armies and then stopped to rest. The only water they found was brackish and foul-tasting and David, in a moment of recollection, said, "Would that I could drink from the well near the gate of Beth-lehem!"

Three young soldiers heard his words. Carrying only their weapons and a skin bag, they went through the Philistine lines which stood between them and Beth-lehem, eluding sentries where they could, fighting their way when they had to, until finally they reached Beth-lehem. There, having filled the skin with water from the well,

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ: לָמָּה תִּדְבָּר עוֹד דְּבַרְיָה? אָמַרְתִּי, אַתָּה וְצִיבָא תַחֲלִקוּ אֶת  
הַשָּׂדֶה!

not go out with us to battle any more lest you quench the lamp of Israel.”

#### A TEMPLE TO THE LORD

AFTER THE LORD had given rest to the king from all his enemies and he had settled in his palace, the king said to Nathan, the prophet: “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the Ark of the

Covenant of the Lord still dwells under curtains.”

The same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan saying: “Go and tell My servant David: ‘You shall not build a house unto My name, because you have made great wars and you have shed much blood. Your son Solomon, he shall build My house [5] and My courts and I will establish his throne forever. His

they returned as they had come, fighting their way back to David’s camp. Bloody and proud, they presented the waterskin to their king. “Let the king drink from the well of Beth-lehem,” they said, “and restore his strength.”

But David, appalled by their wounds, cried out, “No! I will not drink water bought at the price of your blood.”

✎ [5] HE SHALL BUILD MY HOUSE: When David was settled in Jerusalem he built a palace for himself and his family. Then he began to plan to build the Temple to the Lord. But the Lord spoke to Nathan, saying: “Go quickly to David because he is a hasty man and tell him, ‘You shall not build My house.’”

David was saddened and asked the Prophet why. Nathan explained: “Solomon, your son, will think first of the Lord and build the Lord’s house before he builds his own.” Then he told David that he was a man of war and therefore not fit to build the Lord’s Temple.

David was saddened and wept. But then he said, “If I am not fit to build the house, at least I am fit to prepare for it.” And so he gathered together on Mount Moriah beams and stone, iron and brass (I Chronicles 22).

Then the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David once again to tell him: “Solomon will build the Temple and within its walls the

דָם לָרֹב שִׁפְכָהּ וּמִלְחָמוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת עָשִׂיתָ – לֹא תִבְנֶה בַּיִת לַשֵּׁמִי, כִּי דָמִים רַבִּים שִׁפְכָהּ.

name is Solomon and I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. I will not take away My mercy from him as I took it away from him who was before you. But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.’”

So did Nathan speak to David. Then David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me so far? For Thy word’s sake and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou wrought all this greatness. Thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like Thee, neither is there any God besides Thee.”

#### DAVID ADDRESSES ISRAEL

DAVID ASSEMBLED in Jerusalem all the princes of Israel, the chiefs of the tribes,

the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, and all the valiant men. David rose to his feet and said: “Hear me, my kinsmen and my people. It was in my heart to build a house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. I had prepared to build it, but God said to me: ‘You shall not build a house to My name, because you are a man of war and you have shed blood.’ And He then said to me: ‘Solomon, your son, he shall build My house and My courts.’

“And you, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father and serve Him with a whole heart and willing mind. Take heed now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the Sanctuary. Be strong and do it!”

Then David said to all the congregation: “Now bless the Lord.” And all the congregation blessed the Lord, the

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Children of Israel will chant: ‘A song at the dedication of the House of David,’ for it was you who first desired to build it.”

[5] HE SHALL BUILD MY HOUSE: Some commentators explained that God had said to David: “As you merited My love through the Psalms, which you wrote with all the fervor of your heart, so will they be established forever. Israel will daily speak them in their prayers. So will your name endure. If you build My Temple, you will do it with equal love and dedication and it will be established forever. If in the future Israel sins, the Temple will stand and Israel will have to be destroyed for its iniquity. But let your son

וְאַתָּה, שְׁלֹמֹה בְנִי, יַעַבְדְּךָ וְעָבְדוּהוּ בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם וּבְנֶפֶשׁ חֲפִצָּה.



God of their fathers, and bowed down  
their heads before the Lord and before  
the king.

DAVID’S LAST WORDS

These are the last words of  
David, [6]  
The saying of David, the son of  
Jesse,  
The saying of the man raised on  
high,  
The anointed of the God of  
Jacob,  
The sweet singer of Israel:  
“The spirit of the Lord has spoken  
by me,  
And His word is upon my tongue.

“The God of Israel said,  
The Rock of Israel [7] spoke to  
me:  
He who rules over man  
righteously,  
He who rules in the fear of God,  
He is like the light of morning  
When the sun rises,  
A morning without clouds;  
When from the sunshine after the  
rain,  
The tender grass springs from the  
earth.  
  
“Is not my house founded by God?  
He has made with me an  
everlasting covenant,  
Fully and clearly set forth.

Solomon build the Temple. He is a fine man but his heart is not as your heart. Then if Israel sins, the Temple can be destroyed as punishment, but Israel will live!”

-  [6] THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID: Why do some of David’s religious poems occur here and others in the Book of Psalms? The Rabbis explained that there are two spirits that flow from God, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Holy Spirit (the Shechinah). David had both spirits, the only man to be so blessed. The Spirit of Prophecy produced the poems that are in the historical books; the gift of the Holy Spirit produced the Psalms and the Shechinah descended only when one was happy or enthusiastic.
-  [7] THE ROCK OF ISRAEL: Why does David speak these two lines, the second of which adds nothing to the first? Because David was

כִּי לֹא כֵן בֵּיתִי עִם אֱלֹהִים, כִּי בְרִית עוֹלָם שָׁם לִי, עֲרוּכָה בְּכָל וְשִׁמּוּרָה.



Will then all my desires and  
 longings not be fulfilled?  
 But the ungodly rulers are as  
 thorns to be thrust away,  
 all of them,  
 That cannot be taken with the  
 hand.  
 If a man touches them,

He must be armed with iron and  
 spearshaft;  
 And they shall have to be burned  
 with fire at their place."

Then David blessed the Lord before  
the congregation and built an altar to  
 the Lord and offered burnt-offerings.

stressing that he was not speaking as David the king, but as David the man, not of his own will or for his own glory, but with words put into his mouth by the Lord. The source was important; the message essential, not the speaker. By thus speaking he demonstrated his own humility for he might easily have taken pride in being chosen by God to be the Lord's mouthpiece.

God said that a ruler over man shall be righteous, even if he rules through the fear of God. The Rock of Israel said: "I rule man; who rules Me? The righteous rule Me, for I make a decree and the righteous may annul it with supplication."

וַיְבָרֶךְ דָּוִיד אֶת יְיָ לְעֵינֵי כָּל הַקָּהָל.



## 20. I KINGS [1-5]

### STRIFE BETWEEN BROTHERS

KING DAVID was old and well advanced in years. Now Adonijah, who was born after Absalom, and who was very handsome, cherished the idea that he would be king. He provided chariots and horsemen for himself, and fifty retainers to run before him. His father had never restrained him, by saying: "Why have you done so?"

Joab, the son of Zeruiah, and Abiathar, the priest, gave him their support. But Zadok, the priest, and Benaiah, the commander of David's bodyguard, the prophet Nathan and David's bodyguard were not with Adonijah.

וַאֲדֹנִיָּה בֶן חַגִּית מִתְנַשֵּׂא לֵאמֹר: אֲנִי אֶמְלֹךְ... וְגַם הוּא טוֹב תָּאֵר מְאֹד וְאוֹתוֹ יִלְדָה אַחֲרַי אֲבִשְׁלוֹם.

Then Adonijah made a solemn feast and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, but he did not invite Nathan, the prophet, nor Benaiah, nor the bodyguard, nor Solomon, his brother. Then Nathan said to Bath-sheba, the mother of Solomon: "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has proclaimed himself king and that David, our lord, does not know it? Now let me advise you, so that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go to David and say to him: 'Have you not, my lord, O king, sworn to your maidservant saying, "Solomon your son shall be king after me"? Why

then has Adonijah been made king?' And while you are speaking with the king, I will come and will confirm your words."

Bath-sheba went into the king's chamber and she bowed and prostrated herself before the king. The king said to her: "What is your wish?" And she said to him: "My lord, you yourself swore to your maidservant by the Lord your God: 'Solomon, your son, shall be king after me and he shall sit upon my throne.' Now Adonijah has proclaimed himself king without the knowledge of my lord. The eyes of all Israel are upon you, that you shall tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord after him; otherwise when my lord, the king, shall sleep with his fathers, I and my son, Solomon, will be considered rebels."

While she talked they told the king: "Nathan, the prophet, is here." [Bath-sheba left the chamber] and Nathan entered and bowed before the king, and he said: "My lord, O king, have you said: 'Adonijah shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne'? For he has gone down this day and made a solemn feast. He invited all the king's sons and Abiathar, the priest, and Joab, the commander of the army, and they are eating and drinking and have said: 'Long live King Adonijah!' But I, Zadok, the priest, Benaiah and your son Solomon were not invited. Now, if this all

has been brought about with the knowledge of the king, then why has this thing not been told to your servant?"

Then David answered and said: "Call Bath-sheba to me." She came and stood before him, and the king swore this oath: "As the Lord lives, who saved my life in all adversity, and as I have sworn to you by the Lord, God of Israel, saying: 'Solomon, your son, shall be king after me,' so will I do this day." Bath-sheba bowed and prostrated herself before the king and said: "May my lord, the king, live forever." Then David said: "Call Zadok, the priest, Nathan, the prophet, and Benaiah, the commander of my bodyguard." They came and stood before the king. The king said to them: "Take with you the warriors commanded by Benaiah and let my son Solomon ride upon my own mule. Bring him to the spring Gihon and there let Zadok, the priest, and Nathan, the prophet, anoint him king over Israel. Afterward, blow the *Shofar* and say: 'Long live King Solomon.' He shall go and sit upon my throne, and he shall be king after me, over Israel and Judah."

#### SOLOMON IS ANOINTED

THEN ZADOK, the priest, Nathan, the prophet, together with Benaiah and David's bodyguard went out and put Solomon on David's mule and brought

וּבָא וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל כִּסֵּאֵי, וְהוּא יִמְלֹךְ תַּחְתִּי וְאוֹתוֹ צִוִּיתִי לִהְיוֹת נָגִיד עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְעַל יְהוּדָה.

him to the spring of Gihon. Zadok, the priest, took a horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Afterward they blew the ram's horn and all the people said: "Long live King Solomon!" Then all the people went up after him playing upon flutes and rejoicing with a great tumult.

Adonijah and all the guests with him heard it as they finished feasting. And they were all of them terrified. They arose and every man went his way, but Adonijah was in such fear of Solomon that he went and caught hold of the horns of the altar. It was told to Solomon: "Adonijah is in fear of King Solomon, so he has caught hold of the horns of the altar and has said: 'I will not go out of the Sanctuary unless King Solomon swears to me that he will not kill me.'" Then Solomon said: "If he be a worthy man, not a hair of his shall be touched. But if he be found guilty of treason then he will die." So Solomon sent and brought him down from the altar. And Adonijah came and prostrated himself before King Solomon and Solomon said: "Go to your home."

#### SOLOMON ANOINTED A SECOND TIME

DAVID ASSEMBLED in Jerusalem all the princes of Israel, the captains of the companies that serve the king, the captains of thousands, the captains of hun-

dreds, and all the officers and mighty men of valor. And he said to all the congregation: "Solomon, my son, whom God alone has chosen is young and tender; and the work to build is great, for it is not a palace for man but for the Lord God. I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold, the silver, the copper, the brass, the iron, the wood and all the precious stones. Now, who will make a voluntary offering today unto the Lord?" Then the heads of the families and the princes of the tribes of Israel, the captains and the overseers of the king's work willingly offered gold, silver, brass and iron. Those who had precious stones offered them to the treasure of the house of the Lord. Then the people rejoiced, for they offered willingly to the Lord.

Thereupon David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: "Blessed be Thou O Lord, the God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that are in heaven and earth are Thine. Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all.

"Solomon, my son, know the God of your fathers, and serve Him with a whole heart and willing mind: for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all thoughts. If you seek Him you will be able to find Him: Take heed now,

כִּי כָל לְבָבוֹת דּוֹרֵשׁ יְיָ, וְכָל יֵצֵר מַחְשְׁבוֹת מֵבִין. אִם תִּדְרֹשׁוּ יִמְצָא לָךְ.

for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the Sanctuary. Be strong and do it!"

Then David said to all the congregation: "Bless the Lord your God."

And all the congregation blessed the Lord, the God of their fathers, and

bowed their heads. They sacrificed unto the Lord and they did eat and drink with great rejoicing. Afterward they made Solomon, the son of David, king, and again anointed him to the Lord to be ruler, and Zadok to be high priest.

David slept with his fathers [1] and

❧ [1] DAVID SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS: As the angel of death took David's soul his body fell to the grass in the royal courtyard. Guards quickly called for the king's physician, for Solomon, for the priests and the elders. When the physician had pronounced the king dead, Solomon ordered the soldiers to carry his father's body into the palace, but the elders intervened. "It is Sabbath," they said, "and it is not permitted to move a dead body on the Sabbath."

"Then what shall be done for my father's body?" the new king asked of the elders.

"The body should be covered and let the guards remain near until the Sabbath is done."

Just then a clamor of barking was heard. "What is that?" Solomon asked his guards.

After investigating, one of the guards returned and explained that the dogs in the king's kennel had not been fed at the appointed time and were barking because they were hungry.

"Feed them that they may be quiet," Solomon ordered.

"Your majesty," the guard explained, "the man in charge left because his mother is sick and he did not cut up the meat for the dogs. Is it permitted to cut the meat on the Sabbath?"

Solomon inquired of the elders and they replied: "To feed a dumb animal, you may cut up the meat."

Solomon then reflected, "To remove my father's body to his room is not allowed, but to cut up meat for dogs to eat is allowed. Now I see how true it is that 'a live dog is greater than a dead lion!' (Ecclesiastes 9:4)."

כִּי יִבְחַר בְּךָ לְבָנוֹת בֵּית לְמִקְדָּשׁ; חֲזֹק וַעֲשֵׂה!

he was buried in the city of David. He reigned over Israel forty years, seven years he reigned in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. Solomon sat upon the throne of David, his father, and his kingdom was established firmly.

#### SOLOMON'S VISION

THE KING went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; a thousand burnt-offerings [2] did Solomon offer upon that altar. In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream that night, and said: "Ask, what shall I give you?"

Solomon said: "Thou hast shown Thy servant David, my father, great kindness. Now O Lord, my God, Thou hast made me king instead of my father,

and I am still but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in. Give Thy servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge [3] this Thy great people?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon asked this thing, and God said to him: "Because you have not asked for yourself a long life neither have you asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked the life of your enemies, but you have asked understanding to discern justice, so I have given you a wise and understanding heart. Also I have given you riches and wealth and honor, which you have not asked."

Solomon awoke, and it was a dream.

🔥 [2] A THOUSAND BURNT-OFFERINGS: When Solomon offered a thousand sacrifices to the Lord in Gibeon, the people were saddened. They said, "Who can equal King Solomon to find favor in the eyes of the Lord? No man can afford so many sacrifices." Then God spoke to the people, saying: "Beloved is he to Me who is merciful to his fellow man more than all the sacrifices that King Solomon offered. 'For I desire mercy not sacrifices, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings' (Hosea 6:6)."

🔥 [3] FOR WHO IS ABLE TO JUDGE: Our Sages explain that Solomon asked for an understanding heart because he said: "A pagan prince may judge in any way he wishes, to hang, to strangle, to have a man beaten or to set him free. He is responsible to no one, for his word is the law. But a Jewish prince may judge only by Your law

וְנָתַתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לֵב שׁוֹמֵעַ לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת עַמֶּךָ, לְהַבִּין בֵּין טוֹב לְרָע, כִּי מִי יוֹכֵל לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת עַמֶּךָ הַכָּבֵד הַזֶּה?

He stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and offered peace-offerings and made a feast for his followers.

#### THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

TWO WOMEN, innkeepers, came to the king and stood before him. One woman said: "O my lord, I and this woman dwell in the same house. I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I was delivered, this woman also gave birth. We were alone in the house, there was no stranger with us. This woman's child died in the night, because she lay on it. She arose in the middle of the night, and took my son from beside me, while

your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead child beside me. When I arose in the morning to nurse my son I saw he was dead. But when I looked at him closely, I saw that it was not the son whom I did bear."

The other woman said: "No, but the dead is your son and the living is my son." So they disputed before the king.

Then the king said: "One says: 'The one who is alive is my son, and the one who is dead is your son.' The other claims: 'No, but your son is the dead, and my son is the living.' So, get me a sword."

They brought a sword to Solomon. The king said: "Cut the living child in two, [4] and give half to one and half to the other."

and Your teachings and if he fails to judge aright, he is then responsible to You."

So God saw that Solomon had asked wisdom not to seek empire or for his own vanity, but truly to judge the people and so He granted Solomon's desire.

☞ [4] CUT THE LIVING CHILD IN TWO: When Solomon heard each woman claim the living child as her son, he said: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other, so no one will be wronged."

When the king's counselors heard that, they lamented, "Woe to the land whose king is but a youth. Solomon is only twelve years old so he talks like a child. Is it not enough that one child is dead? Now he will kill the other."

גִּזְרוּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי לְשֵׁנַיִם, וְתָנוּ אֶת הַחֲצִי לְאַחַת וְאֶת הַחֲצִי לְאַחַת.

At that, the woman to whom the living child belonged spoke to Solomon, for her heart yearned for her son: "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put it to death."

But the other woman said: "It shall be neither mine nor yours; split it!"

Then the king said: "Give the first woman the living boy, and by no means kill him. She is his mother."

When all Israel heard of the decision the king had rendered, they stood in awe of the king; for they saw the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

#### SOLOMON'S KINGDOM

KING SOLOMON ruled over all Israel, and over all the kingdoms, from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. These kingdoms paid tribute and served Solomon all his life.

Solomon appointed twelve governors over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household; each governor had to make provision for one month in the year. King Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen. He had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. He placed them in chariot cities, and some were with the king in Jerusalem. All the drinking vessels of King Solomon were of gold, and all the utensils of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of rare gold. And silver in Jerusalem was as common as stones, cedars were as plentiful as the sycamore trees in the lowland. He had peace on all sides about him. Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan to Beer-sheba. Judah and Israel were as the sand [5] which is by the sea for multitude, eating and drinking and making merry.

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No sooner had Solomon ordered the deed when the true mother cried out: "O my lord, by no means put the child to death. Give the child to her."

Immediately the assembly understood that Solomon's clever ruse had revealed the true mother and they acclaimed him in unison: "Happy is the land whose king is mature in judgment and not the pawn of his counselors!"

☞ [5] AS THE SAND: Were there really that many Israelites? Obviously there were not. But the Rabbis say that a man cannot be counted

יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל רַבִּים כַּחֲוֵל אֲשֶׁר עַל הַיָּם לָרֹב, אוֹכְלִים וְשׁוֹתִים וְשִׂמְחִים.



## THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

GOD GAVE Solomon great wisdom and understanding and largeness of heart. [6] Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the wise people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt, and his fame spread to all neighboring nations.

He composed three thousand parables and a thousand and five songs. He spoke concerning trees, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that springs from the wall. He spoke concerning beasts, of fowl and of creeping things, and of fishes. Men came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of the wisdom of Solomon.

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as one counts clay counters or coins. A person is counted according to his worth so that when the Hebrews sinned in the wilderness, Moses was considered more than all Israel. But when the people repented, each Israelite was again considered the equal of Moses. Now, under Solomon, because the people lived according to God's commandments, each was worth an infinite amount so that Scripture can compare them to the sands of the sea. The Jews are like sand in lime; without the sand the lime has no substance.

🔥 [6] LARGENESS OF HEART: Solomon was said to have the wisdom of all Israel: the young and the old, the learned and the unlearned. Each of these has its own peculiar wisdom: the young have daring, the old experience, the scholars learning, and the unlearned the shrewd common sense of those close to nature. Solomon had all their wisdoms combined.

וַיִּתֵּן חֵכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה מִחֵכְמַת כָּל בְּנֵי קִדְּם וּמִכָּל חֵכְמַת מִצְרָיִם.



## 21. I KINGS [5-8]

### THE RESOLVE TO BUILD THE TEMPLE

WHEN HIRAM, king of Tyre, heard that Solomon was anointed king after the death of his father, he sent his officers [to congratulate him], for Hiram had ever been friendly to David. Then Solomon sent a message to Hiram, saying: "You know that David, my father, could not build a temple in honor of the Lord, his God, because of the wars which surround him. But now the Lord, my God, has given me tranquillity on every side. There is no adversary nor evil occurrence. I am resolved, therefore, to build a house to honor the Lord, my God.

"Now the house which I am to build is to be great, for our God is greater than all gods. Who is able to build Him a house, for the heavens cannot contain Him? Who am I to build Him a house? I build a house only to hallow it to Him, a place to burn before Him incense of sweet spices and for the burnt-offerings every morning and evening, on the Sabbath, on the new moon, and the festivals.

"Now send me men skilled to work in gold and silver, in bronze and iron, in purple, crimson and violet stuffs, and who know how to engrave. Also command men to cut the cedar-trees of Lebanon, and my servants shall be with your servants, I will pay the hire of

וַעֲתָה הֵנִיחַ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי לִי מִסְבִּיב, אֵין שָׁטָן וְאֵין פֶּגַע רָע. וְהֵנִי אֹמֵר לְבָנוֹת בֵּית  
לְשֵׁם יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי.

your servants according to all you say, for you know that there is no one among us, who has the skill to hew timber like the Zidonians."

Hiram sent to Solomon, saying: "I will do as you desire concerning the timber of cedar and cypress. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon to the sea, and I will make the logs into rafts to go by the sea to the place you shall direct. There I will have them broken up. And you shall receive my servants, and you shall provide food for my household.

"Now, I am sending a skillful man filled with wisdom and understanding. He is the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father is of the tribe of Naphtali, who resides in Tyre. He is skillful to work in gold, in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, in timber, in purple, in blue, in fine linen and in crimson. He also can perform all manner of engraving and do whatever may be set before him."

King Solomon raised a levy of thirty thousand forced laborers out of all Israel. He sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand

a month in relays. And [from the aliens in the country] Solomon took seventy thousand porters, and eighty thousand hewers in the mountains. There were also three thousand and three hundred officers who had charge of the people who did the work. The king commanded and they quarried heavy [1] stones to lay the foundation of the Temple.

#### THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

IN THE four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the second month of the year, Solomon began to build the Temple. The house which King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, its breadth twenty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. The porch in front of the Temple was twenty cubits, corresponding to the breadth of the Temple and ten cubits wide. The windows of the Temple [2] were broad within and narrow without. The house was built of stones made ready in the quarry; neither

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❧ [1] HEAVY STONES: The Hebrew for "heavy stones" may also mean "costly stones." The Rabbis said that not only did Solomon order the parts of the Temple which were visible to be properly ornamented but also those parts which were buried in the ground and were unseen, because it was all for the glory of God who sees all.

בְּשָׁנָה הָרְבִיעִית בְּחֹדֶשׁ זִיו, הוּא הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי לְמֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּבֶן הַבַּיִת לַיהוָה.

hammer, nor ax, nor any iron tool [3] was heard in the house while it was being built.

Hiram who was brought from Tyre and who was a skillful master in metal, [made the vessels of the Temple] and all

the metal work. He fashioned two columns of bronze. He made two capitals, a capital of lily-work on top of each column. And the pomegranates were two hundred, in rows about each capital. He set up the columns at the porch of the

🕯 [2] THE WINDOWS OF THE TEMPLE: Why did Solomon have the Temple windows built broadly within and narrowly without? The usual way allowed for more light to enter and would have illuminated the Temple more brightly.

Our Sages tell us that Solomon wanted to emphasize that the Lord needs no light, but radiates His own light to the world. As Scripture has it (Daniel 2:22): "The light dwells within Him." The pagans believed that their gods needed light to see what to do. Pagan gods also needed nourishment so that their worshipers prepared bread and sacrificed animals to them to sustain them. The Temple had similar paraphernalia, a *menorah*, an altar, a table with showbread, but these were used in a different way. In order to demonstrate that the *menorah* was not to give light so that the Lord should see how to eat, it was placed on the south side of the Temple, the table with showbread on the north side, and the altar between the two of them.

Why then did the Lord command the making of these things if He had no need of them? "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, did so to make Israel able to acquire merit. Therefore, He multiplied the Torah and the precepts for them."

🕯 [3] ANY IRON TOOL: Because Solomon wished the Temple to be a symbol of peace and dedicated to peace, he did not want implements of war made of iron used in it or in its construction. From the spirits Solomon heard of a strange worm of wonderful powers called the *shamir*. The *shamir* cut or split any material, stone or metal, into any shape, and without exertion. But where to find the *shamir*?

רָצָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לִזְכוֹת אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפִיכָךְ הִרְבָּה לָהֶם תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת.

Temple. The column which he set up at the right hand he called Jachin, and that on the left side he called Boaz.

So Solomon built the house, and finished it. And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar; from the floor of the house up to the joists of the ceiling, he covered them on the inside with wood; and he covered the floor of the house with cypress

boards. And in the Sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood and doors of olive wood. [4] And he built the inner court with three rows of hewn stone, and a row of cedar beams.

He made ten lavers of bronze, and he made ten bases of bronze. Solomon had made all the vessels of the house of the Lord: the golden altar, the golden table upon which was the showbread; and he

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Only Ashmodai, king of the evil spirits, might know. By a ruse Solomon's men captured Ashmodai and chained in bonds that bore the seal of the name of the Lord they brought him before the king. Solomon promised Ashmodai that he would release him if Ashmodai told where the *shamir* might be found and Ashmodai obliged.

Solomon then sent an expedition to the mountains of darkness. There his men placed a huge pane of glass over the nest of a roc, trapping its young. The mother roc, when she could not break the glass with her beak, flew off and returned with the *shamir*. As she split the glass Solomon's men leaped screaming from their hiding places and the roc, frightened, dropped the *shamir*. Solomon's men seized the *shamir* and brought it back to Jerusalem.

There Solomon had it used to split all the rock and metal for the Temple and then returned the *shamir* to the roc's nest. The roc swiftly carried it back to its secret hiding place.

☞ [4] OF OLIVE WOOD: The Ralbag notes that the wood was taken from old olive trees which no longer bore fruit. We are told that acacia was prescribed for the Tabernacle in order to teach man that when he wants to build a house, he must remember that God Himself used wood for His own house from a tree that does not bear fruit. How much more so then should an ordinary man refrain from using fruit-bearing trees for timber.

וַיִּקַּם אֶת הָעַמּוּד הַיְמָנִי וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ יָכִין, וַיִּקַּם אֶת הָעַמּוּד הַשְּׂמָאלִי וַיִּקְרָא  
אֶת שְׁמוֹ בּוֹאֵז.

made a *menorah*, five branches on the right side and five on the left, before the Sanctuary. They were both made of pure gold.

When all the work of the House of the Lord was finished, Solomon brought in all the sacred objects of his father David, the silver, the gold, and all the vessels, and placed them in the treasures of the House of the Lord.

#### BRINGING THE ARK TO THE TEMPLE

THEN SOLOMON assembled in Jerusalem all the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, and the princes of the families of Israel, to bring the Ark of the Covenant from the City of David which is Zion. All the men of Israel assembled before King Solomon at the festival of Tabernacles, which is in the seventh month of the year. The priests and the Levites took up the Ark of the Covenant, the Tent of Meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent. Then the priests placed the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord in the Sanctuary of the Temple, in the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim. There was nought in the Ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there in Horeb, when the Lord made a Covenant with the Children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

The Levites who were the singers stood at the end of the altar robed in fine linen, holding cymbals, flutes and lyres. Beside them stood a hundred and twenty priests with trumpets. The trumpeters and the singers joined in a loud song of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. They played and sang:

For He is good,  
His mercy endures forever.

When the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the House of the Lord, and the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the House of the Lord. Then said Solomon:

I have built Thee a house of  
habitation,  
For Thee to dwell in forever.

#### SOLOMON'S PRAYER

THE KING turned his face and blessed the congregation of Israel, and said: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who said to my father David: 'Since the day that I brought My people Israel from out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that My name might be there; but I chose David [5] to be over My people Israel,' and the Lord also said to him: 'It was in your heart to build a house to Me; you did well, that you

בָּנָה בְּנִיָּתִי בֵּית זְבוּל לָךְ, מָכוֹן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ עוֹלָמִים.

thought of it. Nevertheless, you yourself shall not build the house, but your son, he shall build it.' Now the Lord has made good His word, for I have risen in the place of my father, and I have built the house for the Lord. And I have provided a place for the Ark, in which is the Covenant of the Lord, which He made with our fathers, when He brought them out of Egypt."

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord, in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel. He spread his hands toward the heavens, and said:

"O Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like Thee in heaven above, nor upon the earth beneath, who keeps a

covenant and mercy with Thy servants, who walk before Thee with all their hearts. But can God really dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, [6] how much less this house which I have built? Yet, turn to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplication, that Thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, that Thou mayest listen to the supplication of Thy servant and Thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place.

"If a man sins against his neighbor, and an oath is to be exacted of him, he shall come and swear before Thy altar in this house. Hear Thou in heaven,

❧ [5] BUT I CHOSE DAVID: What connection is there between "I chose no city . . . but I chose David"? The Lord considers who shall lead the people and only then does He build the city and bring the people into it. The Rabbis said that the duty to choose the king comes even before the duty to build the Temple. The verse therefore means: "I chose no city until I had seen that David was a fitting shepherd of Israel."

❧ [6] HEAVEN CANNOT CONTAIN THEE: God does not need a place to stand much less a place in which to dwell. God's glory can be revealed to man's senses in a cloud or a fire, or in a still small voice. But it cannot be said that God is in a place, for He is not a body with dimension that space can surround. For this reason the Rabbis called God "Place" (*Makom*) as in "Blessed be the Place [God] who gave the Torah to Israel." So, too, the Psalmist (90:1) could say: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place."

הִנֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא יִכְלְכְלוּךָ, אֵף כִּי הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתִי.

and judge Thy servants, punishing the wicked and justifying the righteous.

“When Thy people Israel are defeated before an enemy, because they sinned against Thee, if they turn to Thee and confess, and make supplication in this house, then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy people.

“If there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence, locust or caterpillar, if their enemy besiege them at any of their gates; whatever plague or sickness there be; all prayer or supplication offered by any man of all Thy people Israel, who will stretch out his hand toward this house in prayer—hear Thou in heaven and forgive his acts. Render to each according to his ways, for Thou alone knowest the hearts of all men.

“Also, concerning the stranger, [7] who is not of Thy people, but comes

from a far country, for Thy name’s sake. If he shall come and pray to this house, then listen to him, and do all that the stranger requests of Thee, so that all the people of the earth may know Thy name and fear Thee, as does Thy people Israel.

“If Thy people go out to battle, and they pray to the Lord toward the city [8] which Thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Thy name, then hear Thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.”

#### A JOYFUL FEAST

WHEN SOLOMON finished praying, he arose from before the altar of the Lord and stood and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying:

☞ [7] CONCERNING THE STRANGER: God is asked by Solomon to answer each Israelite “according to his ways.” In other words, God is to judge each Israelite, then answer him if he merits an answer. But the stranger is not to be judged the same way. Solomon asks God to do all “that the stranger requests of Thee,” whether the stranger merits it or not. Why does Solomon ask more for the non-Jew than he asks for the Jew? Solomon does so in order that the stranger, the non-Jew, should thereby be able more easily to appreciate the holiness of God and of His Temple.

☞ [8] THEY PRAY TO THE LORD TOWARD THE CITY: In Diaspora the worshipers should turn in prayer toward the Land of Israel, to the

לְמַעַן יִדְעוּן כָּל עַמִּי הָאֲרָץ אֶת שְׁמִי לִירְאָה אוֹתָךְ כְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.



"Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel as He promised. May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us nor forsake us. Let your heart be completely with the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day."

Then the king and all Israel with him

offered sacrifices before the Lord. They made a feast for seven days, after celebrating for eight days the festival of Tabernacles. Then he sent the people away. They blessed the king, and went home joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown to David, His servant, and to Israel, His people.

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east. In the Land of Israel, they should turn their faces toward Jerusalem, the Holy City. In Jerusalem, toward the Temple. In the Temple toward the Holy of Holies. So does all Israel direct its heart toward one place and toward God alone.

יְהִי יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִמָּנוּ, כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, אֵל יַעֲזָבֵנוּ וְאֵל יִטְשֵׁנוּ.



## 22. I KINGS [7-14]

### BUILDING KING SOLOMON'S PALACE

SOLOMON WAS thirteen years [1] in building his own palace until he finished the entire house. He also built the Forest of Lebanon House. Its length was one hundred cubits, its breadth was fifty cubits and its height thirty cubits. Now

King Solomon made two hundred shields of beaten gold, twenty pounds of gold went into each shield. He also made three hundred small shields of beaten gold, about six pounds of gold in each of them. Then the king put them in the Forest of Lebanon House.

He also made a great throne of ivory,

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[1] THIRTEEN YEARS: Why did Solomon take thirteen years to build his palace and only seven to build the Temple? The Temple was larger and should have taken twice as long, not half as long. Because, our Sages explain, Solomon was inspired and eager to finish the Temple for it was a holy project. His own palace did not excite this same sense of enthusiastic dedication. The Sanctuary was more

וְאֵת בֵּיתוֹ בָּנָה שְׁלֹמֹה שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וַיְכַל אֶת כָּל בֵּיתוֹ.

and overlaid it with fine gold. The throne had six steps. Behind the top of the throne was a round canopy. There were arms on both sides of the throne. Two lions stood beside the arms, and twelve lions stood on each side of six steps. There was not the like in any kingdom.

His own residence was behind the hall of the throne, built of like work. He also made a house for Pharaoh's daughter, [2] whom Solomon married.

#### KING SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

WHEN THE Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to test him with riddles. She came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels

bearing spices, and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon she spoke to him about all that was in her mind. Solomon answered all her questions, there was not a thing which he could not explain to her. The Queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, the palace that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his courtiers, and the magnificent retinue which accompanied him when he went up to the House of the Lord. And she said to the king: "The report which I heard in my own land of your acts and your wisdom was true. I did not believe it until I came and saw it with my own eyes. And now I see not half was told me; you surpass in wisdom and prosperity all that I had heard. Happy are your people, happy are your servants who

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magnificent than the king's palace. And Solomon was assiduous in building the Sanctuary but remiss in completing his own house. In this Solomon was more meritorious than David who built his own palace first.

🕒 [2] THE DAUGHTER OF PHARAOH: When Shimei ben Gera, Solomon's teacher, died, Solomon approached Pharaoh and arranged to marry Pharaoh's daughter. Solomon brought her to Jerusalem and took her into his palace.

On that very day the angel Gabriel plunged earthward and placed a reed in the sea. The sea was in turmoil, mud clung to the reed, then earth formed, and soon it was a large land. That land became the center of the imperial city of Rome.

וְהָיָה לֹא הָגֵד לִי הַחֲצִי, הוֹסַפְתָּ חֲכָמָה וְטוֹב אֶל הַשְּׂמוּעָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי.

stand continually before you and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the Lord your God, who set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel for ever, [3] therefore He made you king to do justice and righteousness." Then she returned and went to her land, she and her servants.

#### KING SOLOMON'S SINS

BESIDES THE daughter of Pharaoh, King Solomon loved many foreign women,

Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites, of the nations concerning which the Lord said to the Children of Israel: "You shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." [4] He had seven hundred wives of princely birth, and three hundred concubines. When Solomon grew old his wives turned his heart away after their gods and Solomon did that which is evil in the eyes of the Lord. He built a high place for the

❧ [3] THE LORD LOVED ISRAEL FOR EVER: But how does God show His love? In the wilderness God performed miracles for the people. Later He sent His judges and prophets, bringing truth and justice to Israel. But after the miracles and the prophecies, the Lord expresses His love in the wisdom He instills in His righteous ones, from ancient times until this very day.

❧ [4] THEY WILL TURN AWAY YOUR HEART AFTER THEIR GODS: Rabbi Sh'muel in the name of Rabbi Jonathan said: "Though King Solomon did not himself actually sin in idolatry, he did not stop his wives from serving their pagan idols. Scripture therefore assigns him the burden of having committed the idolatry himself. When Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh, she brought a thousand varied musical instruments to him. "Each of these," she pointed out, "is used to worship a different idol." She played for him and Solomon made no objection.

When Solomon's other wives saw that, they all built their own high places and sacrificed there to their own idols. Since Solomon could have prevented that, Scripture also assigns the responsibility for it to him, and the verse says: "Then did Solomon build a high

וַיְהִי לָעֵת זָקֵנָה שְׁלֹמֹה, וְנָשָׂיו הָטוּ אֶת לְבָבוֹ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים.

Chemosh, the detestable idol of Moab, in the mountain that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the detestable idol of Ammon. So he did for all his foreign wives, he built high places, burning incense and sacrificing to their gods.

The Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and He said to Solomon: "Since you have not kept My covenant and My statutes which I have commanded you, I will rend the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. However, I will not do it in your

lifetime for the sake of David, your father. I will rend it out of the hand of your son. Still I will not tear away the whole kingdom, but I will leave one tribe to your son for David, My servant's sake, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

#### JEROBOAM'S REVOLT

JEROBOAM, THE son of Nebat, was a man of much valor, and he lifted up his hand against the king, because Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breach [5] of the City of David, his father. Solomon

place for the Chemosh, the detestable idol of Moab . . . and for Molech the detestable idol of the children of Ammon" (I Kings 11:7).

Rabbi Jonathan commented: "He who has the power to protest against the wrongs committed in a household and does not do so is held responsible for the wrongs committed by each member of the household. He who has the power to protest the wrongs done in his city and does not protest is held responsible for the wrongs committed in the city. He who has power to protest the wrongs committed by the whole world and does not protest, he is held responsible for the wrongs of the whole world."

🌀 [5] REPAIRED THE BREACH: Rabbi Johanan said: Why did Jeroboam deserve to be king? Because he admonished the king in the name of heaven. And why was he punished? Because he did so publicly.

Jeroboam said to Solomon: "Your father tore the breaches in the wall so that the people of Israel might readily come up on their pilgrimages to Jerusalem, but you have repaired the breaches to provide a pleasure pavilion for your Egyptian wife."

יַעַן אֲשֶׁר הִיָּתָה זֹאת עִמָּךְ, וְלֹא שָׁמַרְתָּ בְּרִיתִי וְחֻקֹּתִי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי עָלֶיךָ, קָרוֹעַ  
אֶקְרַע אֶת הַמַּמְלָכָה מֵעָלֶיךָ וְנָתַתִּיהָ לְעַבְדְּךָ.

saw that the young man was industrious, so he put him in charge of all the forced labor of the tribe of Joseph. Once, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh met him on the road. Now Ahijah had put on a new garment, and the two were alone in the field. Then Ahijah took hold of his new garment and tore it in twelve pieces, and he said to Jeroboam: "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: 'I will tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to you; but he shall have one tribe, for David, My servant's sake, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, because they have forsaken Me.'" [6]

Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, but he fled to Egypt, and he was there until Solomon died.

Solomon reigned over all Israel forty years. Then Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David.

#### THE DISRUPTION OF THE KINGDOM

REHOBOAM WENT to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. When Jeroboam heard of the death of Solomon, he still dwelt in Egypt. Then the people sent for him, and he and all the congregation of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying: "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now lighten the heavy yoke of your father, and we will serve you."

Then he said to them: "Depart for three days and then return to me." The people departed.

King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men who had stood before Solomon, his father: "How do you advise that we reply to these people?" They said to him: "If you comply with their demands this day and talk kindly to them, they will be your servants forever."

Then he took counsel with the young men, who had grown up with him and who were his companions: "What do

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❧ [6] FORSAKEN ME: The reader might think that the "they" refers to the tribes, but the Rabbis said: "No, they refer to Solomon's wives." Israel remained loyal to God but the wives had been converted to Judaism at Solomon's insistence not because they themselves were committed to the worship of the true God, but to please the king. They therefore relapsed quickly into their idolatry and forsook the Lord.

אָבִיךָ הִקְשָׁה אֶת עֲלֵנוּ, וְאַתָּה עָתָה הִקְלֵ מֵעֲבֹדֶת אָבִיךָ הִקְשָׁה וּמַעֲלֹ הַכֶּבֶד...  
וְנַעֲבֹדָךְ.

you advise that we reply to the people who have spoken to me?"

The young men spoke to him, saying: "Thus shall you say to them: 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. My father burdened you with a heavy yoke, and I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.'"

When Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, the king answered them harshly, saying: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, and I will chastise you with scorpions."

When the people heard it, they called out: "What portion do we have in David? To your tents, O Israel!" So Israel departed.

Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was head of the forced labor, to quell the revolt, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam leaped into his chariot and fled to Jerusalem.

Thus Israel rebelled against the house of David. The whole assembly made Jeroboam king over Israel: only the tribe of Judah followed the house of David.

#### SHEMAIAH AVERTS A CIVIL WAR

REHOBAM CAME to Jerusalem and assembled a hundred and eighty thousand warriors from the tribe of Judah and

from the tribe of Benjamin to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom back. But the word of God came to Shemaiah, the man of God, saying: Speak to Rehoboam and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and the rest of the people, saying: "Thus said the Lord: 'You shall not go and fight your brothers, the Children of Israel. Return every man to his house for this is the way I, the Lord, have planned it.'"

So they listened to the word of the Lord, and turned and went away according to His command.

#### THE GOLDEN CALVES

JEROBOAM FORTIFIED Shechem in the highland of Ephraim, and dwelt there. He also fortified Penuel. Then he said in his heart: "If the people go up to offer sacrifices in the House of the Lord in Jerusalem, their heart will turn back to Rehoboam, and they will kill me, and the kingdom will return to the house of David." So Jeroboam made two golden calves. He set up one in Beth-el, and the other in Dan, and said to the people: "You have gone up long enough to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."

He also made sanctuaries in high places, and appointed priests, people

אָבִי יִסֵּר אֶתְכֶם בְּשׁוֹטִים, וְאֲנִי אֵיִסֵּר אֶתְכֶם בְּעֶקְרֵי בָּיִם.

who were not from the sons of Levi. He ordained the feast on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, a month which he had devised of his own heart.

The Lord spoke to Ahijah, saying: "Go say to Jeroboam: 'Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: I exalted you from the midst of the people, and made you a prince over My people, Israel. I

tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you, but you have done evil and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me. Therefore I will utterly sweep away the house of Jeroboam as a man sweeps away waste. The Lord will raise up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam.'" [7]

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☞ [7] TWO GOLDEN CALVES: The Lord tried to persuade Jeroboam to repent because He remembered Jeroboam's piety, scholarship and devotion to the common people. So the Lord spoke to Jeroboam, saying: "Repent, My son, and I, and David, and you will walk in the Garden of Eden." Then Jeroboam asked: "Who will lead?" The Lord said: "The son of Jesse." So Jeroboam rejoined: "If that is so, I refuse." Thus was Jeroboam designated the greatest sinner of all generations: "He sinned and caused many to sin, and therefore the sins of many are ascribed to him."

וְהָקִים יְיָ לּוֹ מֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲשֶׁר יִכְרִית אֶת בֵּית יִרְבְּעָם.





## 23. I KINGS [14-19]

### CHRONOLOGY OF THE KINGS

JEROBOAM REIGNED for twenty-two years. His son Nadab became king and reigned over Israel for two years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. Then Baasa conspired against Nadab, and smote all the house of Jeroboam, and became king over Israel. Baasa reigned for twenty-four years, and his son Elah became king. He ruled for two years.

His servant Zimri, a captain of the chariots, conspired against him, and killed him and all the household of Baasa. Omri, the chief of the army, besieged Zimri in Tirzah, and Zimri died

in the battle. He reigned for seven days and Omri became king.

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijam. Asa succeeded his father Abijam. Jehoshaphat reigned after the death of his father Asa.

### THE REIGN OF OMRI

IN THE thirty-first year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel. He reigned in Tirzah six years. Then he bought the mountain of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver. He built a city on the mountain, and called it Samaria, after the name of

וַיִּבֶן אֶת הָהָר, וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שֵׁם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה ... שְׁמֶרֹן.

Shemer, the owner of the hill. Omri walked in the ways of Jeroboam, and made Israel sin. He reigned for twelve years and died. He was buried in Samaria, and his son Ahab reigned in his stead.

#### THE REIGN OF AHAB

AHAB, THE SON of Omri, reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. The least of his transgressions was that he walked in the ways of Jeroboam for he took to wife Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and served Baal and worshiped him. He built in Samaria a temple to Baal, and erected an altar there. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

In his days Hiel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations upon his first born

son Abiram, and set up its gates upon his youngest son Segub.

#### ELIJAH AND THE DROUGHT

THEN ELIJAH of Tishbi said to Ahab: "As the Lord the God of Israel lives whom I serve, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except according to my command."

Then the word of the Lord came to him saying: "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the river-bed of Cherith, east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the river and I have commanded the ravens [1] to feed you there." So he went and did according to the word of the Lord and dwelt at the river-bed of Cherith, and the ravens brought him bread [2] and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening and he drank the water from the river.

❧ [1] I HAVE COMMANDED THE RAVENS: Some of our Sages translate the Hebrew *orvim* not as ravens but as merchants. Others explain that the Lord told Elijah to hide in the city of Oreb where the inhabitants would feed him.

❧ [2] RAVENS BROUGHT HIM BREAD: God created the ravens on condition that in time to come they would feed Elijah. So it is with all the miracles in Scripture; when the Lord created the world, He did so arranging the appointed time and place when these miracles would occur.

חַי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר עֲמַדְתִּי לְפָנָיו, אִם יִהְיֶה הַשָּׁנִים הָאֵלֶּה טַל וּמָטָר כִּי  
אִם לִפִּי דְבָרִי.

After a time the river-bed dried up [3] because there was no rain. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying:

"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Zidon, and stay there. I have ordered a widow there to provide for you."

❧ [3] THE RIVER-BED DRIED UP: Rabbi Yosé said: "Elijah was very hot-tempered and dealt too severely with Ahab. The Lord promised Elijah that there would be no rain except on Elijah's command." Our Sages, in their picturesque language, said that the Lord had given Elijah the key to rain. But the Lord thought Elijah would have pity on the suffering people and not withhold the rain too long. For that reason He commanded the ravens to feed the prophet so that Elijah would see that even the ravens, the cruelest of birds, can perform acts of kindness and so learn to be more compassionate himself. But Elijah did not relent.

Then the Lord made the river-bed dry up to let Elijah suffer too, so that perhaps he would release the Lord from His promise and permit rain to flow. But Elijah was adamant.

So the Lord sent Elijah to the pious widow of Zarephath. She was known as an upright and God-fearing woman and when the child died, she said to Elijah: "Formerly God had been gracious to me, because in comparison to the inhabitants of the city, I was righteous. But now He has abandoned me because my virtues are nothing in the presence of a great and pious man such as you are, Elijah."

Then Elijah prayed to the Lord and said: "Almighty God, revive the child so that people will not say that as a guest I repaid the widow's hospitality with evil. Take pity on the poor woman."

Then the Lord said to Elijah: "You are concerned with the widow's grief, but you have no compassion for My children who suffer. I will pay no heed to your petition until you release Me from My promise to withhold the rain."

So Elijah returned the key of rain to the Lord and the Lord gave the prophet the power to revive the child, and then told him: "Go, show yourself to Ahab and I will send rain on the land."

קום לך צִרְפָּתָה אֲשֶׁר לְצִידוֹן וַיֵּשְׁבֶתָ שָׁם, הִנֵּה צִוִּיתִי שָׁם אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה  
לְכַלְכְּלָהּ.

He arose and went to Zarephath, and as he came to the gates of the city there was a widow gathering sticks. He called out to her: "Bring me, I beg you, a little water in a vessel that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called out to her: "Bring me, I beg you, a bit of bread with it." She replied: "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing but a handful of meal in the jar and a little oil in a cruse. I am just gathering a few sticks that I may go and prepare it for myself, and my son, that we may eat before we die." Then Elijah said to her: "Fear not, go and do as you have said. But first make me from it a little cake and bring it to me, afterward make one for yourself and your son. Because this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said: 'The jar of meal shall not be exhausted nor shall the cruse of oil give out until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the land.'"

So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household did eat day after day. The

jar of the meal was not exhausted, neither did the flask of oil fail, as the word of the Lord which He spoke to Elijah.

In the third year of the drought, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying: "Go, show yourself to Ahab, [4] and I will send rain upon the land." So Elijah went to Ahab. Now, when Ahab saw Elijah, he said to him: "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"

And he said: "It is not I who has scourged Israel, but you and your father's house, for you follow the Baalim. Now, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel, to Mount Carmel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of the Baal, and the four hundred prophets of the Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table."

#### ELIJAH AND THE PRIESTS OF BAAL

AHAB SENT to all Israel, and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. Then Elijah approached the people, and

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☞ [4] GO, SHOW YOURSELF TO AHAB: When the Lord spoke thus to Elijah, the prophet said: "Almighty God, why should You send rain to relieve the famine when Ahab has not repented?" Then the Lord answered: "I sent rain upon the land when Adam was one man though he might afterward sin and when he did become a sinner. Therefore shall I still give rain, though the people sin, because whatever man is he is man and My creature."

לֹא עָכַרְתִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי אִם אֶתָּה וּבֵית אָבִיךָ, בַּעֲזֹבְכֶם אֶת מִצְוֹת יְיָ וַתִּלְךְ  
אֲחֵרֵי הַבָּעָלִים.

said: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him."

The people answered him not a word.

Then Elijah said to the people: "I, I alone am left as a prophet of the Lord, but the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men. Let them give us two young bullocks, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it

in pieces, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under it. I will prepare the other bullock and place it on the wood, and put no fire under it. Then you call to your god, and I will call [5] to the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." Thereupon all the people answered: "It is well-spoken."

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal: [6] "You choose a bullock and

❧ [5] I WILL CALL: Why did Elijah enter such a contest with a detested foe? It meant he had to set up an altar away from Jerusalem, far from any recognized shrine. It meant he had to use a "high place" which was particularly forbidden. It meant that he, who was neither priest nor Levite, would have to assume their duties, which was also forbidden. In trying to bring the people of Israel back to the Lord, Elijah would thereby be shattering the law in the presence of a multitude easily led astray.

In normal times no altar could be built or sacrifices offered outside of the Temple in Jerusalem. But, our Rabbis say, the Lord said: "Let no one think that Elijah transgressed by sacrificing on Mount Carmel while the Temple was in being. Though it was prohibited by the Torah, it was I who commanded him."

❧ [6] THE PROPHETS OF BAAL: Why did the prophets of Baal accept the contest so willingly? They had seen what Elijah could do in withholding the rain. Were they not afraid?

Not at all. They brought an altar with a hollow base from a nearby shrine and inside it concealed Hiel the Beth-elite with a pot of burning charcoal. When the priests called loudly on "the name of Baal," Hiel was to insert the charcoal through a hole in the altar, but, we are told, a snake emerged from under the altar and

עַד מָתִי אַתֶּם פּוֹסְחִים עַל שְׁתֵּי הַסְּעִיפִים? אִם יְיָ הָאֱלֹהִים – לָכוּ אַחֲרָיו, וְאִם  
הַבַּעַל – לָכוּ אַחֲרָיו.

prepare it first, for you are many. Put no fire under it and call to your god." So they took the bullock which he gave them and they prepared it, and called to Baal from morning till noon, saying: "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, nor answer. Then they danced a halting dance around the altar which they had made.

When it was noon, Elijah mocked them: "Call with a loud voice for he is god! He may be meditating, or he is on a journey, or perchance he is asleep and must be awakened." They cried aloud and slashed themselves, as their custom was, with swords and lances till the blood gushed. They worked themselves into a frenzy; the midday passed; it was time for the evening sacrifice, but there was no voice, nor any answer.

Then Elijah said to the people: "Draw

near." [7] The people came near to him. Elijah took twelve stones, the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel, and with the stones he rebuilt the altar of the Lord that was thrown down. He made a trench around the altar. He arranged the wood on the altar, cut the bullock, and laid it upon the wood, and he said: "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt-offering and on the wood." Then he said: "Do it again." And they did. He said: "Do it a third time." And they did, so the water ran around the altar.

When it was time for the evening offering, Elijah came near and said: "O Lord, God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known today that Thou art God, and I am Thy servant, and I did all this at Thy command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this

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bit Hiel so that he died. The priests then danced and sang and shouted, thinking that Hiel had fallen asleep and that they would so awaken him, but Hiel was beyond waking.

✎ [7] DRAW NEAR: Why did Elijah ask the people to draw near before he repaired the altar? The Rabbis said he did so in order to have all Israel participate in repairing the altar as a united people. When Elijah had made the repairs with the hearts of the people united behind him, then the *Shechinah*, God's presence, was drawn, for when the people are united in peace, then the spirit of God descends on them.

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם, יִצְחָק וְיִשְׂרָאֵל, הַיּוֹם יוֹדַע כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי עֹבֵדְךָ.

people may know that Thou Lord art God."

Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-offering, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they prostrated themselves, and called out: "The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God."

Elijah said to the people: "Seize the prophets of Baal: let not a man of them escape." So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the river-bed of Kishon, and there they were killed.

Elijah said to Ahab: "Go up, eat and drink, for there is the rushing sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went up to eat and drink and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel and crouched down upon the earth and hid his face between his knees. He said to his servant: "Go up now and look toward the sea." He went up and looked and said: "There is nothing." Elijah said: "Go again seven times." The seventh time the servant said: "There arises a cloud out of the sea as small as the palm of a man's hand." Elijah said: "Go and say to Ahab: 'Harness your chariots and go down, that the rain may not hinder you.'"

In a short time the heavens grew black with clouds; there was wind and a great downpour. Ahab rode and arrived at Jezreel. The hand of the Lord was upon Elijah, so that he girded up

his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

#### THE VISION OF MOUNT HOREB

AHAB TOLD Jezebel what Elijah had done, and how he had killed the prophets of Baal. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying: "May the gods do so [to me] and more also if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life the same as the life of any one of them."

When Elijah saw this he fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, and left his servant there. He himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and sat down under a broom tree, and prayed that he might die, saying: "It is enough. O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." He lay down and slept under the broom tree.

Behold, an angel touched him and said: "Arise and eat." He looked and there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a flask of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord returned a second time, and touched him and said: "Arise and eat because the journey is long." He arose, and he ate and drank and, with the strength of that food, he went for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the Mount of God. He came there to a cave and lodged there.

הָיָה עָב קִטְנָה כִּכָּף אִישׁ עוֹלָה מֵיָם. וַיֹּאמֶר: עֲלֵה אֶמֶר אֶל אַחָאָב, אֲסֹר וְרִד  
וְלֹא יַעֲצָרְכָּה הַגָּשָׁם.

The word of the Lord came to him and when Elijah heard it he wrapped his face in his mantle and he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. There came a voice to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" [8] And he said: "I have been zealous for the Lord because the Children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, Thine altars they

have thrown down, they have slain Thy prophets with the sword and I, only I, am left and they seek to take away my life."

Then the Lord said: "Go outside, and stand upon the mountain before Me." A great and strong wind that rent mountains and broke rocks in pieces came before the Lord, but the Lord was not

❧ [8] WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, ELIJAH? When Elijah hid in the cave at Mount Horeb and stood in the cleft of the rock he heard a still small voice saying, "God is compassionate, mild and considerate. He draws the people to Himself with bonds of love and soft speech. What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle and replied: "I have been zealous for the Lord. The Children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant. They have stopped circumcizing children. They have thrown down Your altars and they seek to take my life."

Then the Lord retorted: "You should have learned from Moses to be forbearing and compassionate. When the Children of Israel sinned with the golden calf, Moses prayed for their forgiveness. But you are angry and zealous. You say that the people of Israel do not keep the command of circumcision. Therefore do I decree that from now to eternity, My children shall put a chair for you at every circumcision feast and you shall come to sit in that chair and witness the *B'rit* for thousands of years."

But still Elijah did not desist, and then the Lord said: "You disparage the people of Israel. Go to Damascus and see where the people worship 365 idols, one for each day of the year, yet still do I make My rain to fall and dew to descend there. But you want Me to destroy My people. You are no longer fit to be My prophet and to dwell in the world. My people who are only human cannot contend with you. Go, anoint Elisha as your successor."

קָנוּא קִנְאָתִי לִי אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת כִּי עָזְבוּ בְרִיתְךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.



in the wind. After the wind followed an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire a still small voice.

Then the Lord said to him: "Go back, take the desert road to Damascus, and when you arrive there anoint Hazael to

be king over Aram, Jehu, the son of Nimshi, you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha, the son of Shaphat, you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. I will punish Israel, but I will spare all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

וְאַחֲרֵי הָרֶעֶשׂ אֵשׁ, לֹא בָאֵשׁ יְיָ. וְאַחֲרֵי הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה.



## 24. I KINGS [19-22]

### THE CALL OF ELISHA

HE DEPARTED from there, and he found Elisha as he was plowing behind twelve yoke of oxen. Elijah came to him, and threw his mantle upon him. He left the

oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said: "Let me kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you."

Elijah said to him: "Go and return, for what have I done [1] to you?"

So Elisha returned and took a pair of oxen and slew them, and took their

[1] WHAT HAVE I DONE: The Rabbis disagreed about what Elijah meant. Some said Elijah was angry that Elisha should think of anything but his new calling. Others said that Elijah was pleased that Elisha should still remember, even at that climactic moment in his life, to observe the Lord's commandment to honor his father and his mother. The Rabbis interpreted Elijah's words to mean: "Go back

וַיַּעֲזֹב אֶת הַבָּקָר וַיֵּרֶץ אַחֲרַי אֵלָיָהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר: אֲשָׁקֶה-נָּא לְאָבִי וּלְאִמִּי וְאֵלְכָה  
אַחֲרָיָה.

yoke to boil the flesh, and gave it to the people to eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah and became his attendant.

#### THE VINEYARD OF NABOTH

NABOTH, THE JEZREELITE, had a vineyard adjoining the palace of Ahab. Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying: "Give me your vineyard, that I may have a garden of herbs, because it is near my house. I will give you for it a better vineyard, or if you prefer, I will give you its value in money."

Naboth said: "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

When Ahab heard it, he went into his house sullen and dejected, and lay down on his bed, turned his face to the wall, and refused to take food.

Jezebel, his wife, came to him, and said: "Why are you so dejected, that you refuse food?"

He said: "Because I said to Naboth, the Jezreelite: 'Give me your vineyard for money, or if you prefer, I will gladly give you another vineyard for it,' and he said: 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

Jezebel said to him: "Is this the way you govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise,

eat and set your mind at ease. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth."

#### JEZEBEL'S SCHEME

SHE WROTE letters in Ahab's name, sealed with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city. She wrote in the letters: "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people, and set two men, base fellows, against him and let them bear witness, saying: 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him to death."

The elders and nobles of Naboth's city did as Jezebel had written in the letters. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. Two base fellows came and sat before him, and bore witness against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying: "Naboth cursed God and the king."

So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying: "Naboth is stoned and is dead." Jezebel said to Ahab: "Arise, and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, who refused to give it to you for money, for Naboth is not alive but dead."

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to your parents, but remember what I have done to you by dedicating your life to God, and return."

אַתָּה עָתָה תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלוּכָה עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל? קוֹם אֲכָל לֶחֶם וַיֵּיטֵב לְבָךְ. אֲנִי אֶתֶּן  
לְךָ אֶת כָּרְם גִּבּוֹת.

When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he went to the vineyard to take possession of it.

#### ELIJAH PRONOUNCES GOD'S JUDGMENT

THEN THE word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying: "Arise, and go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to possess it. You shall say to him: 'Have you slain and also taken possession?' Thus said the Lord: In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick your blood."

And Ahab said to Elijah: "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered: "I found you, because you have sold yourself to do that which is evil in the eyes of the Lord. Therefore, I will bring evil upon you. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam for making Israel sin. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the valley of Jezreel."

When Ahab heard these words, he tore his garments and put on a sackcloth and fasted. He slept in sackcloth and walked barefoot. The word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying: "Have you seen

that Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because of that, I will not bring the evil in his days but in his son's days."

#### THE DEATH OF AHAB

THE KING of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went up to Ramoth-gilead: The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat: "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you put on your own robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself before he went into battle. Now an archer drew his bow at random, and shot the king of Israel between the breast plate and the lower part of the armor.

But the battle grew fiercer that day, so the king held himself upright in his chariot facing the Arameans until evening. The blood from the wound ran out into the bottom of the chariot. He said to the driver of his chariot: "Wheel about and take me out of the battle, for I am badly wounded." In the evening he died. [2] About sunset the cry passed throughout the army: "Every man to his city, every man to his land [for the king is dead]!"

So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there. When they washed the chariot by the

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☞ [2] IN THE EVENING HE DIED: Ahab repented after his crime against Naboth. He fasted and prayed morning and night; and the Lord

וַדְּבַרְתָּ אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר: כֹּה אָמַר יְיָ, הִרְצִחְתָּ וְגַם יִרְשָׁתָּ?

pool of Samaria, the dogs licked his blood, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke.

The rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory palace which

he built, and all the cities which he built, all is written in the Book of Chronicles of the king of Israel. Ahab slept with his fathers, and his son Ahaziah reigned in his stead.

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forgave him. When he was mortally wounded in battle, his blood ran out onto the floor of his chariot. Then Ahab exerted all his strength and courage to remain standing in order not to frighten and panic his soldiers.

וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶחָאָב עִם אֲבוֹתָיו, וַיִּמְלֹךְ אַחֲזִיָּהוּ בְנוֹ תַחְתָּיו.



## 25. II KINGS [2-7]

### ELIJAH ASCENDS TO HEAVEN

IT WAS before the Lord took up Elijah by whirlwind into heaven. Elijah and Elisha went on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha: "I pray you, remain here, for the Lord has sent me to Beth-el." Elisha answered: "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not

leave you." So they went down to Beth-el.

Then the sons of the prophets [1] who were in Beth-el came out to Elisha, and said: "Do you know that the Lord will take your master away from you today?" He said: "Yes, I know, only hold your peace."

Elijah said again to Elisha: "Remain here, I pray you, for the Lord has sent

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[1] THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS: Why were the followers of the prophets called "the sons of the prophets"? Our Sages answer that the disciples are called sons and the teachers called fathers, because a teacher gives spiritual life to his disciples as a father gives physical life to his sons.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְיָשָׁע: חַי יְיָ וְחַי נַפְשְׁךָ אִם אֶעֱזֹבְךָ.

me to Jericho." And he said: "As the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So they entered Jericho. Elijah said again to Elisha: "Remain here, I beg you, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." Elisha said: "As the Lord lives, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

Now fifty men of the followers of the prophets went and stood opposite them at a distance, while they too stood by the Jordan. Elijah took his mantle, rolled

it up, and struck the waters of the Jordan and they divided on either side, and they crossed on dry ground. And it was when they crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha: "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you."

Elisha said: "Let there be a double portion of your spirit [2] upon me." He answered: "You have asked a hard thing. If you see me as I am being taken away [3] from you, it shall be so with you, but if not, it shall not be so."

❧ [2] DOUBLE PORTION OF YOUR SPIRIT: Rabbi Yosé said: "Every man is jealous of his friends, except his sons and his disciples." A man is generally jealous of his reputation and achievement and often envious of friends or even relatives who advance higher and more swiftly than he does. But a teacher does not envy his student when the student outdoes the teacher. Nor does a father feel envy when his son accomplishes more than he has. Both teacher and father rejoice in their pupils' and sons' achievements.

When the servant came to David to congratulate him on Solomon's assumption of the throne, he said to the king: "Let God make Solomon's name better than your name and his throne greater than your throne" (I Kings 1:47). And David did not resent it but blessed the Lord. And when Elisha asked of Elijah, "Let a double portion of your spirit be on me," Elijah was not angry; he wished only for Elisha's desire to be fulfilled.

❧ [3] IF YOU SEE ME TAKEN AWAY: No man can endow another with the gift of prophecy. Elijah said to Elisha, if you have the merit, if God has granted you the inner sight to see me taken from you, then you may become what you ask. But if you do not see me taken from you, then God has not granted you the gift of prophecy and then I cannot grant you your wish.

בְּכָל אָדָם מִתְקַנָּא, חוּץ מִבְּנוֹ וְתַלְמִידוֹ.

As they walked and talked, [4] a chariot of fire and horses of fire came between them, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

Elisha saw it and cried out: "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen." And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his clothes and rent them into two pieces. He took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and returned.

The followers of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him and said: "The spirit of Elijah is upon Elisha." They came to meet him and bowed before him to the earth and said: "There are

with your servants fifty stalwart men, let them go, we beg you, in search of your master."

He said: "Do not send."

But they pressed him [5] until he could not resist their request any longer, so he said: "Send." They sent the fifty men, and they searched for three days and did not find him. They returned to him while he stayed in Jericho.

#### THE FLASK OF OIL

THE WIFE of one of the followers of the prophets cried out [6] to Elisha: "Your servant, my husband, is dead, and you

🔥 [4] AND TALKED: What did they talk about? Elisha knew that Elijah was about to leave this world, and so he kept on asking questions concerning the Torah, and Elijah answered him. God had sent His angels with the chariot to remove Elijah but the angels would not interrupt the prophets' discussion of Torah. Finally, the angels removed the cloud that hid the chariot so that both Elijah and Elisha could see it—and the chariot's brightness filled the sky. The two prophets ceased their talk of Torah and, thunderstruck, gazed up at the heavens. Then the chariot swooped low and Elijah disappeared.

🔥 [5] THEY PRESSED HIM: Why did Elisha allow the young men to roam the wilderness for three days when he knew they would find nothing? When Elisha returned, the sons of the prophets crowded around him. They heard the story of the chariot and feared that Elijah might have fallen from it, or been put down in some remote and inaccessible place. That is why they asked if they might go out to seek him. At first Elisha refused, for he knew that Elijah had been transported, but when he realized that the young men sought

וְאֵלִישָׁע רוֹאֶה וְהוּא מַצֵּק: אָבִי אָבִי, רֶכֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפָרָשָׁיו.



know that your servant feared the Lord. Now the creditor has come to take away my two children as bondsmen."

Elisha said to her: "What have you in the house?" She said: "Only a small flask of oil." [7] He said to her: "Go borrow of your neighbor's empty vessels; borrow as many as you can, then shut yourself and your sons in the house, and pour the oil in the vessels."

She went from him, and she shut herself and her sons in the house. They

brought the vessels to her and she poured. As soon as the vessels were full, she said to her son: "Bring me another." He said to her: "There is not another empty vessel." Then the oil stopped.

She came and told the man of God. He said to her: "Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt and you and your sons can live on what is left." [8]

#### THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON

ONE DAY Elisha went to Shunem, and

the older prophet out of love and zeal, and that they might suspect him of coveting his teacher's place, he permitted them to go.

🔗 [6] THE WIDOW WHO CRIED OUT: According to tradition the widow who cried out to Elisha about the great wrong done her was the wife of Obadiah, the man who had saved a hundred prophets from the wrath of Jezebel (I Kings 18:13). Obadiah hid the prophets in caves, fed them, and soon his money was gone because food and drink were very expensive. Then he had to borrow money from Jehoram, heir to the throne, at usurer's rates, and was soon so deeply in debt that he could not repay his debts before he died. Jehoram then wanted to take Obadiah's two children as slaves in forfeit for their father's debt.

🔗 [7] A SMALL FLASK OF OIL: Why did Elisha ask the widow whether she had anything in the house? And only after she told him that she had a flask of oil did Elisha say the blessing of the Lord would enter the oil, that the oil would then increase and fill all her vessels? Our Sages explain that no blessing from above can descend on a void. What is below and human must be prepared to receive and use the miracle from above.

לְכִי מְכַרִי אֶת הַשֶּׁמֶן וְשַׁלְמִי אֶת נְשִׁיךְ, וְאֶת וּבְנֶיךָ תַחְיִי בַנוֹתָר.

there was a great lady who persuaded him to partake of food. So it was afterward that as often as he passed there, he would turn to her to eat food. She said to her husband: "I see that this man, who often passes by us, is a holy man of God. Let us build a little chamber for him on the roof, and let us put there a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us he can turn there."

One day he came there and went into the chamber and rested. He said to Gehazi, his servant: "Call this Shunammite woman." He called her, and she stood before him. He said to Gehazi: "Say to her: 'You have troubled yourself so

much for our comfort, what is to be done for you? Is it to speak for you to the king, or to the commander of the army?'" She said: "I dwell among my own people." [9]

He said to Gehazi: "What then is to be done for her?" Gehazi said: "She has no son, and her husband is old." Elisha said: "Call her back." He called her, and she stood in the doorway. Elisha said: "At this time next year you shall embrace a son." She said: "No, my lord, man of God, do not deceive your servant." But the next year the woman gave birth to a son, at the time that Elisha had said.

When the child was grown, he went

🔔 [8] ON WHAT IS LEFT: When the woman went to sell her oil she found that the price had risen greatly and she had enough money to live on. But the widow asked could she hold the oil even longer because the price was rising. No, the prophet said, go and sell the oil now. You will have enough to pay your husband's debts and afterward to live for the rest of your life. The miracle was performed to help you and your sons but not to make you rich by speculation.

🔔 [9] I DWELL AMONG MY OWN PEOPLE: When Elisha asked the Shunammite woman what he could do for her, whether he might speak to the king, or the commander of the army for her, she replied: "I dwell among my people." Rabbi Baḥya ibn Pakuda said that the Shunammite meant to say, "If I am wronged in any way, I have my own people who will protect me and look after my interests; and, if necessary, who will appeal to the proper authorities." Therefore, it is written (Deuteronomy 10:19): "You shall love the stranger."

נַעֲשֶׂה-נָא עֲלֵית קִיר קַטְנָה וְנָשִׂים לוֹ שָׁם מִטָּה וְשִׁלְחָן וְכִסֵּא וּמִנּוֹרָה.

out one day to his father among the reapers. He said to his father: "My head, my head." The father said to his servant: "Carry him to his mother." When he was brought to his mother, the boy sat in her lap till noon and he died. She ascended and laid him on the bed of the man of God, closed the door, and went out.

Then she called her husband, and said: "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may hasten to the man of God, and return." He said to her: "Why do you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath. [Is all well?]" She said: "It shall be well."

Then she saddled the donkey, and said to her servant: "Drive fast, do not slacken my pace unless I tell you." She went and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When the man of God saw her at a

distance, he said to Gehazi: "Look, there is the Shunammite woman. Run to meet her, and ask: 'Is all well with you? With your husband? With the child?'" She answered: "All is well," but when she came to the man of God at the mountain of Carmel, she grasped his feet. When Gehazi tried to push her away, Elisha said: "Let her alone, for her soul is bitter within her and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me."

Then she cried: "Did I ask a son of my lord? Did not I say: 'Do not deceive me?'"

Elisha said to Gehazi: "Make haste, take my staff in your hand and go! If you meet any man do not salute him. If any man salutes you answer him not, [10] and lay my staff on the face of the child." But the mother of the child said: "As the Lord lives, I will not leave you." So he arose, and followed her.

Now Gehazi had gone before them

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❧ [10] ANSWER HIM NOT: Gehazi was proud of serving Elisha and downcast only in that he was permitted to do so little for his master. When he was sent with the staff, he set out hurriedly. Now he thought he was to perform a miracle on his own, but when people recognized him and Elisha's staff, and asked him where he was going, Gehazi scoffed and laughed and told them that he was off to perform a miracle. The people followed him and crowded into the room where the boy lay. They watched as Gehazi placed the staff on the boy's body—but nothing happened. His skepticism made him unworthy of being an agent through whom miracles are per-

הַרְפָּה לָהּ כִּי נִפְשָׁהּ מָרָה לָהּ וַיֵּי הָעֲלִים מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא הִגִּיד לִי.

and laid the staff on the face of the child. There was neither a sound nor hearing. He returned to meet them, and told him: "The child has not awakened."

Elisha came to the house. The boy was lying dead on his bed. He went in the chamber, closed the door upon the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. Then he lay upon the child, put his mouth to his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes and his hands upon his hands, and stretched himself upon him; the flesh of the child became warm. Then he rose and paced back and forth in the house. Then he went up and stretched

himself upon the child, and the boy sneezed seven times, and he opened his eyes.

He called Gehazi and said: "Call the Shunammite." When she came to him, he said: "Take up your son." [11] She fell to his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, took up her son, and went out.

#### ELISHA CURES LEPROSY

NAAMAN, [12] COMMANDER of the king of Aram's army, was highly esteemed by his master because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was

formed. Gehazi failed because he doubted Elisha's power to revive the child. Then Elisha came, emptied the room of the intruders, and prayed for the boy.

❧ [11] TAKE UP YOUR SON: Our Sages ask: "Why did neither Elijah nor Elisha revive their own parents after they died?" The Rabbis explained that when one performed a miracle he endangered his own life because the miracle worker wearies God by making Him change the laws of nature. So the miracle worker was in danger of dying before his time but not when the miracle is performed for one who merited it. The woman of Zarephath had endangered her life to feed Elijah. The Shunammite had served and fed Elisha unselfishly and without thought of reward. Both were worthy and merited the prophets' miracles.

❧ [12] NAAMAN: In the eyes of the king of Aram, Naaman was a great and important man because it was Naaman, the archer, who in the battle of Gilead drew the bow and killed Ahab, king of Israel.

וַיַּעַל וַיִּגְהַר עָלָיו, וַיִּזְוֶר הַנֶּעֶר עַד שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וַיִּפְקַח הַנֶּעֶר אֶת עֵינָיו.

a valiant man, but a leper. The Arameans had gone out on a marauding expedition and carried off a little girl from the Land of Israel. She became a servant to the wife of Naaman. She said to her mistress: "Would that my master saw the prophet who is now in Samaria, then he would cure him of his leprosy." When Naaman heard it he went and told it to the king of Aram. The king said: "Go now and I will send with you a letter to the king of Israel."

Naaman departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold and ten festal robes. He brought the letter to the king of Israel and the letter said: "Now, when this letter reaches you, be informed that I have sent Naaman, my servant, to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

When the king of Israel read the letter he rent his garments and cried out: "Am I a god to kill and make alive, that this man sends me a letter to cure a man of leprosy? Clearly he seeks an occasion to make war against me."

When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes he sent to the king, saying: "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come to me and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house.

Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be well and clean."

Naaman was enraged and left. He said: "I thought he would come out to me, stand and call on the Name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the leprous place and so cure the leprosy. Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

Then his servants went up to him and said: "Master, if the prophet had demanded of you some great thing, would you not have done it? Why not then when he says to you: 'Wash and be clean.'?" Then Naaman went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan as the man of God told him to do and his flesh became once more like the flesh of a little child.

He returned to the man of God, with all his company, and stood before him and said: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. Therefore, I beg you, accept a present from your servant." Elisha said: "As the Lord lives, I will take nothing." Naaman urged him but he refused. Then Naaman said: "If not, at least let there be given to your servant two mules' loads of earth. [13] For henceforth your servant will offer neither burnt-offering,

לָמָּה קָרַעְתָּ בְּגָדֶיךָ? יָבוֹא נָא אֵלַי וַיֵּדַע כִּי יֵשׁ נָבִיא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.

nor any sacrifice to any other gods but to the Lord. Only in this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: When my master, the king, goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, he will be leaning on my arm, and I also will have to bow in the house of Rimmon when he bows. Then may the Lord pardon your servant in this matter." And Elisha said: "Go in peace."

#### FAMINE IN THE BESIEGED SAMARIA

AND IT came to pass that Ben-hadad, king of Aram, assembled all his army, and besieged Samaria. The famine was so severe in the city that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver. As the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall a woman cried out: "Help, my lord, O king!" He said: "If the Lord did not help you, how can I help from the threshing floor or the wine press? But what is your trouble?"

The woman said: "This woman said to me: 'Give your son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we cooked my son and ate him. On the next day I said to her:

'Give your son that we may eat him,' but she has hidden her son." When the king heard the words of the woman, he rent his clothes and the people saw that he wore sackcloth next to his skin.

Now Elisha was sitting in his house, with the elders sitting beside him. While he was talking with them, the king of Israel came down to him, and said: "See, this evil is from the Lord. Why should I hope for the Lord any longer?"

Elisha said: "Hear you the word of the Lord. Thus said the Lord: 'Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria.'" Then the captain, upon whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God: "Even if the Lord would make windows in the heavens, could this thing be?"

Elisha said: "You yourself shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

#### THE PLENTY AFTER THE FAMINE

NOW THERE were four lepers at the entrance of the gate, and they said one

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⚡ [13] TWO LOADS OF EARTH: When the Children of Israel live according to the laws of their Father in heaven, then no one would dare to take even a load of earth from their land without permission.

וַיֹּאמֶר: הֲנֵה יִי עוֹשֶׂה אֲרָבוֹת בְּשָׁמַיִם, הֲיִהְיֶה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה? וַיֹּאמֶר: הֲנִיכָה רוֹאָה  
בְּעֵינַיָךְ וּמִשָּׁם לֹא תֹאכֵל.

to another: "If we enter the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there, and if we remain here, we die also. Therefore let us desert to the camp of the Arameans. If they let us alive, we shall live; if they kill us, we shall but die."

So at twilight they set out to go to the camp of the Arameans. When they came to the edge of the camp, there was no man there; for the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a noise of chariots, of horses, and of a great army. So they said one to another: "The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us." So they arose and fled in the twilight, and abandoned their tents, their horses, their donkeys, everything was left as it was, and they fled for their lives.

When the lepers came to the outermost part of the camp they entered into a tent, ate, drank and carried away silver, gold, and raiment, and went and hid it. They returned and entered another tent, and carried away what was there, and went and hid it.

Then they said to one another: "We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, but we are keeping still. Let us go and inform the house of the king." They came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and said: "We came to the

camp of the Arameans, but there was no one there; no sound of man, but the horses tied, the donkey tied and the tents were as they have been."

The gatekeepers called out, and informed the house of the king within. The king arose in the night, and said to his officers: "Let me tell you what the Arameans have done. They know that we are hungry. Therefore they have gone from the camp and hid themselves in the field, thinking: 'When they come out of the city we shall take them alive, and so get into the city.'"

One of the officers answered: "Send some men with the five of the horses that are left. If they die, they will be like all the multitude of Israel that perish here. Let us send and see."

They took two chariots with horses, and the king sent them after the army of the Arameans, and said: "Go and see."

They followed them to the Jordan and all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. The messengers returned, and told the king.

The people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord! The king appointed the captain upon whose hand he leaned to guard the gate, but

וַיְהִי סָאָה סֵלֶת בְּשֶׁקֶל וְסָאֲתִים שְׁעוֹרִים בְּשֶׁקֶל, כַּדְּבָר יְיָ.

in the rush the people trampled him to death. It happened as the man of God had spoken: "Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria." When the captain said: "Even if the Lord Him-

self would make windows in the heavens, could this be?" And the man of God said: "You yourself shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat it." So it happened to him, for the people trampled upon him in the gate so that he died.

וַיְהִי לוֹ כֵּן, וַיִּרְמְסוּ אוֹתוֹ הָעָם בַּשֶּׁעַר וַיָּמוּתוּ.





## 26. II KINGS [8-15]

### ELISHA AND THE KING OF ARAM

ELISHA CAME to Damascus [1] and Ben-hadad, the king of Aram, was sick. When he was told: "The man of God

has come here," the king said to Hazael: "Take a gift in your hand and go to meet the man of God and through him inquire of the Lord whether I shall recover from this illness."

[1] ELISHA CAME TO DAMASCUS: Our Sages say that Gehazi came to Damascus to demand payment from Naaman for the suffering that had befallen him. Elisha had transferred Naaman's leprosy to Gehazi. Elisha came to Damascus to persuade Gehazi to repent, but Gehazi said that the Lord does not accept the repentance of those who sin and cause many others to sin. Elisha disagreed with him, but Gehazi persisted.

What were the other sins of Gehazi? Our Sages tell us that he made a magnet which lifted Jeroboam's idols and suspended them

קח בידך מנחה ולך לקראת איש האלהים, ודרשת את יי מאותו לאמר:  
האחיה מחלי זה?

So Hazael took a gift and went to meet him. When he came to Elisha he stood before him and said: "Your son Ben-hadad, the king of Aram, has sent me to ask you whether he will recover from his illness." Elisha said to him: "Go and say to him: 'You shall surely recover,' but the Lord has told me that he will certainly die." Hazael stared at Elisha a long time, then the man of God wept. [2] Hazael said: "Why does my lord weep?" And Elisha answered: "Because I know the cruelties which you will inflict on the Children of Israel; their fortresses you will set on fire, their young men you will put to the sword, their little children you will dash to pieces and you will rip their unborn children from their women's wombs." Hazael said: "Your servant is but a dog,

how can he achieve this great thing?" Elisha said: "The Lord has shown me that you are to be king of Aram."

When Hazael returned to his master, Ben-hadad said to him: "What did Elisha say to you?" Hazael answered: "He said to me that you would surely recover." But on the next day Hazael took the bathcloth, dipped it in water and spread it over the king's face, so that he died. And Hazael became king in his stead.

#### CONSPIRACY AGAINST AHAB'S HOUSE

ELISHA, THE PROPHET, called one of the sons of the prophets [3] and said: "Gird up your loins, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. When you come there look for Jehu,

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between heaven and earth so that the people were persuaded that the idols had supernatural powers.

☞ [2] THE MAN OF GOD WEPT: Elisha wept when he saw that Hazael would become king. He foresaw the cruelties Hazael would commit and the horrors shocked him. But Hazael did not recoil from the atrocities or from the thought that he would commit them. He considered them great deeds, the heroic bouts of war.

☞ [3] ONE OF THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS: The young man was said to be the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai, Elisha's disciple. As Elisha had served Elijah, so had Jonah served Elisha until he was ready for prophecy himself.

לך אָמַר לוֹ: הִיאַ תְּחִיָּה, וְהָרָאֲנִי יְיָ כִּי מוֹת יָמוּת.

the son of Nimshi, and bring him to an inner chamber. Then take the flask of oil, pour it on his head, and say: 'Thus said the Lord: I have anointed you king over Israel.' Then open the door and flee, and do not tarry."

The young man went to Ramoth-gilead, and when he came there, the officers of the army were sitting together. He said: "I have a word for you, O captain." Jehu said: "For which one of us?" And he said: "For you, commander."

Jehu arose and went in the house. [The young man] poured the oil on his head, and said: "Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: 'I have anointed you king over the people of the Lord, over Israel. You shall smite the house of Ahab, your master, to avenge the blood of My servants, the prophets.'" Then he opened the door and fled.

Jehu came out to the officers of his master, and one said to him: "Is all well? Why did this madman come to you?" He answered: "You know how a man like that talks." They said: "Tell us what he said."

He answered: "He said: 'Thus said the Lord: I have anointed you king of Israel.'"

Then every man of them quickly took his garment and put it under Jehu on the top of the stairs, blew the horn and cried: "Jehu has become king!"

Jehu said: "If this is your will, then

see that none escapes out of the city to tell it in Jezreel." He rode his chariot to Jezreel, where Joram, king of Israel, was recuperating from his wounds in the war with Hazael, king of Aram. Ahaziah, king of Judah, the son of Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, was also there, because he had come down to see Joram.

Now the watchman who stood on the tower in Jezreel caught sight of the dust cloud raised by Jehu's company as it came. He called out: "I see a company!"

King Joram said: "Take a horseman, and send him to meet them and let him say: 'Is it in peace?'" So the rider on the horse went and met them, and said: "Thus said the king: 'Is it in peace?'"

Jehu said: "What have you to do with peace? Turn behind me and follow." The watchman reported: "The messenger came to them, but he does not return. However, the driving is like the driving of Jehu, for he drives like a madman." King Joram said: "Harness my chariot." As soon as they harnessed the chariot, Joram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, set out each in his chariot, and they drove to meet Jehu. They reached him in the field of Naboth, the Jezreelite. And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said: "Is it peace, Jehu?" And he answered: "How can there be peace so long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her

כֹּה אָמַר יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: מִשְׁחָתִיךָ לְמֶלֶךְ אֶל עַם יִי, אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

witchcrafts are so great?" And Joram turned and fled, and said to Ahaziah: "There is treachery, O Ahaziah." And Jehu drew his bow with all his strength, and smote Joram between his arms, and the arrow went out of his heart, and he sank down in his chariot. Then [Jehu] said to Bidkar, his captain: "Remember how when you and I were riding side by side after Ahab, his father, the Lord pronounced this prophecy against him: 'Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, [4] and I will punish you in the same field.' Now, go, cast him into the same plot of ground."

Ahaziah, king of Judah, fled by the way of the garden house. Jehu said: "Follow him, and kill him also in the chariot." [And they smote him.] He fled to Megiddo, and died there.

#### THE EXECUTION OF JEZEBEL

JEHU CAME to Jezreel. As soon as Jezebel learned of it, she painted her eyelashes, adorned her head, and looked out of the window. When Jehu came in the gate, she said: "Is it all well with you, traitor, your master's murderer?" He raised his eyes to the window, and called out: "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three officers looked out to him. He said to them: "Throw her down!" They threw her down and some of her blood spattered on the wall, and the horses trampled her down.

He went in and ate and drank, and then said: "Look after this cursed woman, and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." They went to bury her, but they found no more than the skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands. [5] They

❧ [4] BLOOD OF HIS SONS: Why did Jehu speak of Naboth's sons dying with him? Scripture had not mentioned them before as having been stoned with their father. The Rabbis give two explanations: first, that although it was against Jewish law, when Naboth was stoned, his family was killed with him, as Jezebel had ordered, so that none might thereafter claim the vineyard; second, the blood refers to the blood of the sons of Naboth who would have been born had Naboth been spared so that, as in the case of Abel, their unborn blood had to be avenged.

❧ [5] SKULL AND FEET: When Jehu heard that the dogs had not eaten some parts of Jezebel's body, he asked the elders of Samaria why.

וַיָּבֹא וַיֹּאכַל וַיֵּשֶׁת וַיֹּאמֶר: פְּקֹדֵי-נָא אֶת הָאֲרוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְקִבְרוּהָ, כִּי בֵת-מֶלֶךְ הִיא.

returned and told him. He said: "This is what the Lord spoke to Elijah, saying: 'In the field of Jezreel shall the dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel!'" [And they buried her.]

#### JEHOASH

JEHOASH WAS seven years old [6] when he became king, and he reigned forty

years in Jerusalem. Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord [7] all the days of Jehoiada, the priest. But Jehoiada became old and he died. After the death of Jehoiada, the princes of Judah came to the king and prostrated themselves before him and persuaded him to forsake the ways of the Lord. The king listened to them. They forsook the way of the Lord, the God of

They told him that Jezebel had not been all evil. If a young couple passed on their way to be married, she would clap her hands and dance and sing before them. And if a body was brought out to be buried, she would wring her hands, bow her head and walk after the bier lamenting. Because her hands and feet and head displayed sorrow toward her fellow human beings or rejoiced with them, the dogs had mercy on those organs and did not devour them.

❧ [6] JEHOASH WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD: Jehosheba had hidden Jehoash for six years. While Athaliah was actively seeking to kill the boy, the boy was hidden in the one place she would not look, the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

❧ [7] RIGHT IN THE EYES OF THE LORD: One of our Sages declares that the people and the young king Jehoash did "what was right in the eyes of the Lord" only because they blindly followed the leadership of the High Priest Jehoiada. Theirs was only a mechanical conformity and repentance; they had not truly returned to the Lord. As soon as Jehoiada died, the people went back to their old sinful ways. They even deified the king. His followers came and said to Jehoash: "Surely you are a god. If you were not a god, how could you be hidden for six years in the innermost part of the Sanctuary and live?" Jehoash agreed with them and declared himself a god.

דָּבָר יִי הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד עֲבָדָיו אֵלֶיהֶו הַתְּשֻׁבִי לְאָמֹר: בְּחֶלֶק יִזְרְעָאל יֵאָכְלוּ  
הַכְּלָבִים אֶת בֶּשֶׂר אִיזָבֵל.

their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. Wrath fell upon Judah and Jerusalem for their guilt.

Then the spirit of God clothed Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, the priest, and he stood above the people, and said: "Thus said God: 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord?' Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you."

But they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the command of the king in the court of the house of the Lord. Before he died, he said: "May the Lord see and require an account."

A year later the army of Aram came up against Judah and Jerusalem. The army of the Arameans was a small company of men, but the Lord delivered the great army into their hand because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. Then the servants of Jehoash conspired against him, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada, and killed him on his bed. They buried him in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the king. Amaziah, his son, reigned in his stead.

When the kingdom was firmly established in the hands of Amaziah, he

killed the servants who murdered his father. But the children of the murderers he did not put to death, according to which is written in the Torah in the book of Moses: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; only for his own sin shall anyone be put to death."

#### CONFUSION AND DISORDER

JEHOASH SLEPT with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel, and his son Jeroboam reigned in his place. He reigned in Samaria forty-one years. He restored the borders of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai, for the Lord saw the bitter affliction of Israel, so He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam.

Jeroboam slept with his fathers and Zechariah, his son, reigned in his place. Zechariah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He reigned in Samaria six months. Shallum, the son of Jabesh, conspired against him and killed him, and reigned

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Chronicles records (II 24:18), "And they forsook the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers . . .; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for their guilt."

לֹא יָמוּתוּ אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וּבָנִים לֹא יָמוּתוּ עַל אָבוֹת, כִּי אִישׁ בְּחַטָּאוֹ יָמוּתוּ.

in his place. Shallum reigned one month in Samaria. Then Menahem, the son of Gadi, came from Tirzah, and killed Shallum and reigned in his place. [8] He was king over Israel for ten years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord all his days.

Pul, the king of Assyria, invaded the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to establish the kingdom under his

rule. And Menahem seized the money from the men of wealth, of each fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria withdrew from the land.

Menahem slept with his fathers, and Pekahiah, his son, became king in his place. He also did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and Pekah, one of his captains, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria and reigned in his place.

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🔗 [8] REIGNED IN HIS PLACE: Our Rabbis state that there was no legitimate king after Zechariah, son of Jeroboam. For more than forty years one usurper after another reigned and all seized the throne by treachery and assassination. One of the Sages asked: "Did not Jehu, grandfather of Jeroboam, also ascend to the throne by treachery and assassination? He killed his master, King Joram, the son of Ahab." The other Sages answered: "Jehu's was a revolt against injustice and idolatry. Jehu was anointed by one of Elisha's disciples so that the revolt was blessed by the prophets. But Shallum and all who followed him killed for their own benefit and gain; therefore, none of them can be considered legitimate rulers."

וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְיָ ... כָּל יָמָיו.



## 27. II KINGS [15-20]

### WAR WITH JUDAH

IN THE DAYS of Pekah, king of Israel, came Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and captured many cities in Israel, and carried them captive to Assyria. Ahaz reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, he did not that which was right in the eyes of the Lord. But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and also made molten images for the Baalim. He burnt his children in the valley of Ben-Hinnom in the abominations of the heathen. And the Lord delivered him into the hands of the king of Aram who carried away a great multitude as captives and brought them to Damascus. Pekah, king

of Israel, also defeated him in a crushing disaster. He killed in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand fighting men, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. And the Israelites carried away captive two hundred thousand women, boys and girls. They also took an immense amount of spoil, and they brought the spoil to Samaria.

But a prophet of the Lord was there, Oded by name. And he went to meet the army that was coming to Samaria, and said to them: "Because of the wrath of the Lord, the God of your fathers, against Judah, He has delivered them into your hand. You have killed them with a fury that has reached up to

הִנֵּה בַחֲמַת יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם עַל יְהוּדָה נְתָנָם בְּיַדְכֶם וַתַּהַרְגוּ בָם בְּזַעַף.



heaven. Now you intend to hold the people of Judah as slaves. Are you not yourself guilty of crimes against the Lord your God? Now hear me: Send back the captives of your brothers, for the fierce wrath of the Lord will be upon you." Then the chiefs of Ephraim stood up, and said to those who came from the war: "You shall not bring the captives here, for you will bring upon us guilt against the Lord."

So the armed men left the captives and their booty. The chiefs of Ephraim took the captives and clothed all those who were naked. They provided them with sandals, and gave them to eat and to drink, and carried all those who were feeble on donkeys; and they brought them to Jericho, to their kinsmen, and then returned to Samaria.

At that time the Edomites came and attacked Judah, and they carried them away captives. The Philistines also raided the cities of the lowland and captured Beth-shemesh.

#### AHAZ ASKS HELP FROM ASSYRIA

THEN AHAZ, king of Judah, sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser, king of As-

syria, saying: "I am your servant and your son. Come and save me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me." Ahaz took the silver and the gold that was found in the House of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it as tribute to the king of Assyria.

Then the king of Assyria listened to him, and went to Damascus, and captured it and carried away the inhabitants captive to Kir.

Hoshea, the son of Elah, conspired against Pekah king of Israel, and killed him, and reigned in his place. Hoshea reigned in Samaria nine years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, though not like the kings of Israel who were before him. [1] Against him came up Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute.

#### THE FALL OF SAMARIA

THEN THE king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, for he sent messengers to the king of Egypt, and he did not bring up tribute to Assyria, as he had done year by year. The king of

❧ [1] NOT LIKE THE KINGS BEFORE HIM: If, as the verse says, Hoshea "did evil in the eyes of the Lord, though not like the kings of Israel who were before him," why then were the ten tribes exiled

עֲבָדָהּ וּבְנָהּ אָנִי, עָלָה וְהוֹשִׁיעַנִי מִכַּף מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם וּמִכַּף מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַקּוֹמִים  
עָלַי.

Assyria shut him up in prison. Then the king of Assyria marched right through the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea's reign, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and carried Israel captive to Assyria, and settled them in Halah, in Habor, and on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

#### WHY SAMARIA WAS DESTROYED

NOW THIS came about because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God who had brought them up from

the land of Egypt. They had worshiped other gods and walked in the ways of the nations whom the Lord had dispossessed before them. They wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord of which He had said to them: "You shall not do these things." Yet the Lord warned Israel by all His prophets, saying: "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments and My statutes according to all the laws which I commanded your fathers and which I sent to you by My servants, the prophets."

However, they would not listen, [2] they were willful and stiff-necked, and

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in his time? Our Sages explain that the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom three times. The first time, in the reign of Pekah, they captured the golden calf at Dan and carried it off with some of the tribes to Babylon. The second time the Assyrians came was in the reign of Hoshea, when they carried off the other golden calf, which stood in Beth-el, together with four tribes.

After that Hoshea removed the guards on the frontiers between Judah and Israel who had kept the people from going up to Jerusalem to worship. But the people insisted on serving the Baalim and none went up to Jerusalem. Then the Lord spoke: "Before this, the people of Israel could blame the king and his guards for not worshipping Me. But now each is responsible for his own transgressions." Then the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom for the third time, destroyed it and exiled the people.

❧ [2] THEY WOULD NOT LISTEN: The Rabbis said that the relationship between God and Israel was like that of the king who at his wedding bound his wife to him with two fine jewels. When the wife lost one

בְּשָׁנָה הַחֲשִׁיעִית לְהוֹשֵׁעַ לְכַד מֶלֶךְ אֲשׁוּר אֶת שְׁמֶרֶן וַיִּגָּל אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשׁוּרָה.

they rejected the Lord's statutes and His covenant which He had made with their fathers and the warning He had given them. They went after things of nought and became nought.

They forsook all the commandments of the Lord and made molten images, worshiped stars and served Baal. They even made their sons and daughters to pass through fire [to Molech]. They practiced magic and witchcraft. They gave themselves up to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. Therefore the Lord became exceedingly angry with Israel and removed them out of His sight. And there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

#### THE NEW SETTLERS IN SAMARIA

THE KING of Assyria brought people from Babylon and from Cuthah and other countries, and settled them in the cities of Samaria, in place of the Israelites. When they first dwelt there, they did not fear the Lord. [3] Therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which continued to kill them. They spoke to the king of Assyria, saying: "The nations which you have carried away and settled in the cities of Samaria do not know the custom of the God of the land, therefore He has sent lions among them and they kill them."

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of them, the king said: "Be careful not to lose the other, or there will be no sign left of our troth."

So, too, was it with Israel. When the Israelites sealed the covenant at Sinai, the Lord gave them *na'aseh v'nishma*—*we will do and we will hearken*. When Israel sinned with the golden calf, the Lord said: "Now you have only *we will hearken*, for you have lost *we will do*."

What is "do"? It is to do the *mitzvot*. What is "Hearken"? It is to hearken to the Torah, to study the Law. When the Northern Kingdom did not follow the *mitzvot*, God still considered them His people, but when they refused to study Torah and did not allow others to do so, they lost both parts of the covenant.

❧ [3] THEY DID NOT FEAR THE LORD: After the king of Assyria exiled the ten tribes, he sent some new peoples to settle in their place. But the land was suddenly infested with wild beasts and lions killed

וַיִּמְאַסּוּ אֶת חֻקֵּי יְהוָה וְאֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אֶת אֲבוֹתָם וְאֶת עֲדוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר הָעִיד בָּם, וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל וַיִּהְבְּלוּ.

Then the king of Assyria gave command: "Send there one of the priests who was carried away from there, and let him dwell there, and teach the people the custom of the God of the land." One of the priests whom they carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Beth-el, and taught them how they should serve the Lord. But each of the nations had also made gods of their own. So they worshiped the Lord, but they also worshiped their own gods, according to the custom of the nations which had been carried away.

So these people came to fear the Lord, and they served their carved images. Their children and children's children

followed the custom of their fathers, so do they to this day.

#### HEZEKIAH, KING OF JUDAH

HEZEKIAH, THE SON of Ahaz, was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as David, his father, had done. He trusted the Lord God of Israel; he cleaved to Him and departed not from following Him, but kept the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses.

So the Lord was with him, and he prospered in all his ventures. He re-

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many of the new settlers. The king of Assyria called for the elders of the exiled Israelites and said to them: "All the years that you dwelt in your land the wild beasts did not afflict you. Now the lions are sorely grieving my people."

Hoping that the king would return the Israelites to their own land, the elders replied: "Our God will not permit a nation that does not live by the Torah to dwell in it." The elders thought that the king of Assyria would surely not force the settlers to convert but the king replied: "Send two of your number to teach my servants concerning your religion." So the elders sent Rabbi Dosetai and Rabbi Zechariah. They taught the new inhabitants the Torah and they wept, for the Rabbis saw that the new inhabitants would never become true converts to Judaism because they had not themselves wished to study the Torah but had had it thrust upon them. As the verse (17:33) tells us: "They appeared to fear the Lord, but in truth, they served their own idols."

בִּי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּטַח... וַיִּדְבֹּק בִּי, לֹא סָר מֵאַחֲרָיו, וַיִּשְׁמַר מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר  
צִוָּה יְיָ אֶת מֹשֶׁה.

belled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza.

#### THE INVASION OF SENNACHERIB

NOW, IN THE fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against [4] the fortified cities of Judah, and captured them. Then Hezekiah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying: "I have sinned.

Withdraw from me and whatever you put on me, I will bear." The king of Assyria made Hezekiah pay three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

Afterward the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rab-saris and Rab-shakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a great army to Jerusalem. They came and took up their position at the channel [5] of the upper pool, and they called

❧ [4] CAME UP AGAINST: How is it that Sennacherib made war on Judah during the reign of Hezekiah? Hezekiah had ordered all the people to study Torah and to walk in its ways. Every child, every woman and man soon became learned. When the Lord told Hezekiah, "I am sending Sennacherib against you," Hezekiah pleaded with the Lord that his people were righteous and did not deserve to be destroyed by the Assyrians.

Then God spoke, saying, "The monarch will come but he shall not prevail."

And still Hezekiah pleaded: "O Lord, neither the fright nor the victory!"

But the Lord replied: "Let the nations see that even the mightiest monarch cannot prevail against righteousness."

❧ [5] THEY TOOK UP THEIR POSITION AT THE CHANNEL: When Sennacherib and his army reached Jerusalem, the king of Assyria exclaimed: "Is this the famed city for whose sake I set my whole army on the march? It looks smaller and weaker than any of the cities I have subdued with my strong hand." His lieutenants said, "Let us take it immediately and make an end of it." But Sennacherib replied: "We have made the ten-day journey from Nob to Jerusalem in a single day. Our warriors are weary. Let us rest tonight." He

וּבְאַרְבַּע עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה לְמֶלֶךְ חֲזַקְיָהוּ עָלָה סִנְחֶרִיב מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר עַל כָּל עָרֵי  
יְהוּדָה הַבְּצוּרוֹת וַיִּתְּפָשִׁם.

out for the king. There came out to them Eliakim who was the steward of the palace, Shebna, the scribe, and Joah, the recorder.

Then Rab-shakeh said to them: "Say you now to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: What confidence is this in which you trust? Do you think that a mere word of the lips is council and strength for war? Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me? You have put your trust in Egypt, in the staff of this broken reed, on which if a man lean, it will run into his hand and pierce it. But if you say to me, We trust in the Lord our God, is it not the Lord whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah, Worship at this altar in Jerusalem? So, make a wager with my

master, the king of Assyria. I will give you two thousand horses, if you have the riders to set upon them. So you can then repulse the attack of the least of my master's servants."

Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to Rab-shakeh: "Speak to us in Aramaic, for we understand it, but do not speak to us in Judean, with the people listening on the wall."

Rab-shakeh answered them: [6] "Did my master send me with this message to your master or to you? It was rather to the men who are sitting on the wall and die of hunger." Then he stood and cried with a loud voice in Judean, saying: "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus says the king: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. Have

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waved his hand derisively toward the city, saying, "Tomorrow, each of you will take just one brick from the city wall and bring it to me and that will be the end of Jerusalem. There will not even be any need to besiege it."

That night the angel of the Lord came and slew Sennacherib's army, for the Lord had spoken: "I will protect the city and save it for My own sake and for My servant David."

❧ [6] RAB-SHAKEH'S PREMONITION: While the army slept, Rab-shakeh stole to the top of the platform from which Sennacherib observed the city. He wanted to see what was going on in the city of his youth now doomed to be destroyed. He saw the Temple all lit and filled with the Jerusalemites. It was the first night of Passover and

מָה הַבְּטָחוֹן הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּטַחְתָּ? אָמַרְתָּ אֶךְ דְּבַר שְׁפָתַיִם עֲצָה וּגְבוּרָה לְמַלְחָמָה.

any of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Was Samaria delivered out of my hand? Make peace with me, and surrender to me. Then can each man eat from his own vine and his own fig tree, and drink water from his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own, that you may live, and not die."

The people were silent, and answered not a word, for the king commanded: "Do not answer him."

#### ISAIAH'S PROPHETIC ASSURANCE

THEN KING HEZEKIAH rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sent Eliakim and Shebna, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, the son of

Amoz. They said to him: "Thus said Hezekiah: 'This is a day of distress, rebuke, and disgrace. It may be that the Lord your God will hear all the words of Rab-shakeh whose master, the king of Assyria, has sent to insult the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard.'"

Isaiah said to them: "Thus shall you say to your master: Thus said the Lord: Do not be afraid of the words of the lads of the king of Assyria who have blasphemed Me. He shall not enter the city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with a shield, nor cast a mound against it. For I will defend and save the city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David. This is the word that the Lord has spoken against him:

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the Levites were singing the *Hallel* Psalms. In the stillness of the night, he recognized the melody and the words:

"When Israel came forth out of Egypt  
The House of Jacob from a people of a strange tongue,  
Jacob became His sanctuary  
Israel His dominion" (Psalms 114:1-2).

Suddenly he felt sure that Sennacherib would not be able to take the city, that somehow the army would be destroyed at the very gates of Jerusalem.

He went down to the king and said: "Master, abandon the siege of the city. I heard them reciting the *Hallel*, and reminded myself that many miracles happen to them on this night. Their God will not desert them now either. Put off taking the city."

וַיְגִיֹּתִי אֶל הָעִיר הַזֹּאת לְהוֹשִׁיעָהּ לְמַעַן דָּוִד עַבְדִּי.

“The daughter of Zion,  
She despises you, and laughs at  
you,  
Whom have you insulted and  
blasphemed?  
Against whom have you raised  
your voice?  
Against the Holy One of Israel!  
By your messengers you have  
insulted the Lord,  
And said: With the multitude of  
my chariots  
I have come up the heights of the  
mountains,  
To the innermost parts of  
Lebanon,  
I have cut down the tallest cedars,  
its choicest cypresses,  
I have dug and drunk foreign  
waters,  
And with the soles of my feet I  
dried up all the streams of Egypt.

Have you not heard, how I  
prepared it long ago,  
And how I brought it to pass?  
Because you have raged against  
Me,  
And your arrogance has come up  
to My ears,  
Therefore I will put My hook in  
your nose  
And My bridle in your lips.  
And I will turn you back the way  
By which you came.’”

That night the angel of the Lord [7]  
went forth and smote in the camp of  
the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-  
five thousand men. Then Sennacherib,  
king of Assyria, returned to Nineveh.  
And when he was worshiping in the  
temple of Nisroch, his god, his sons  
smote him with the sword, and Esarhad-  
don, his son, reigned in his place.

Sennacherib only laughed and replied: “It was my wish that we  
should come to this city and take it. For this I have gathered a  
mighty army and tomorrow we shall take Jerusalem.”

But Rab-shakeh’s premonition came true.

🔥 [7] THE ANGEL OF THE LORD: According to tradition the Assyrians  
began their siege on the first night of Passover. Despite the be-  
leaguering army, the Israelites celebrated the feast of their deliver-  
ance from bondage in Egypt. As they sang the *Hallel*, the song in  
praise of the Lord, the angels also sang the *Hallel* before the  
Celestial Throne. Amidst all this beauty the heavens were cleft, but  
the Israelites continued to chant God’s praises unawares. The As-

וְשִׁמְתִי חֲחִי בְּאַפִּי וּמִתְגִּי בְּשִׁפְתֶיךָ, וְהִשְׁבֹּתִיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בָּאתָ בָּהּ.



## HEZEKIAH IS SAVED

IN THOSE DAYS Hezekiah was sick to death. Isaiah, the prophet, the son of Amoz, came and said to him: "Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, [8]

saying: "Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a whole heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Before Isaiah was gone out of the inner court of the city, the word of the Lord came to him, saying: "Return,

syrians looked up, and, overwhelmed by rapture, their souls departed from their bodies.

✎ [8] PRAYED TO THE LORD: When Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would die, he added, "in this world and in the next." Hezekiah wept sorely and begged the prophet to tell him why. Isaiah said, "Because you have done evil in the sight of the Lord."

Hezekiah replied, "I have cleansed the idols from the land and taught the people Torah."

"But you disobeyed God's first injunction," Isaiah said. "You have never married and fathered children."

Hezekiah replied: "I saw a vision of my progeny and that they would all be evil. Better none than evil."

"No," Isaiah rebuked him, "why do you concern yourself with the mysteries of the Almighty? You must do your duty and the Lord will do whatever pleases Him."

"You are right," Hezekiah answered. "Give me your daughter to wife and with God's help we shall have children. And perhaps your merit and mine might cause the children to be virtuous."

"Too late," Isaiah said.

Then Hezekiah said, "Even if the sword is on your neck it is not too late to pray." So he prayed to God as Isaiah left and the Lord told Isaiah to return, for He had forgiven Hezekiah. And then the king married Isaiah's daughter.

אָנָה יי, זָכַר-נָא אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאֵמֶת וּבְלֵב בָּשָׁר וְהָטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי.

and say to Hezekiah: 'Thus said the Lord, the God of David, your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the House of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your days; and I will deliver

you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake.'” And Isaiah said: “Take a cake of figs.” And they took and placed it on the boil and Hezekiah recovered.

שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת תְּפִלָּתְךָ, רָאִיתִי אֶת דְּמַעֲתְךָ, הִנְנִי רוֹפֵא לָךְ; בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי תַעֲלֶה  
בֵּית יְיָ.



## 28. II KINGS [20-25]

### KING MANASSEH

HEZEKIAH SLEPT with his fathers, [1] and Manasseh, his son, reigned in his place. He was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. He did evil [2] in the eyes of the Lord, after the abomi-

nations of the nations whom the Lord cast out before the Children of Israel. He built altars for Baal, and made an Asherah, and set the graven image of the Asherah in the House of the Lord. He made his son pass through the fire, and practiced soothsaying and witchcraft. He also shed very much innocent blood,

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[1] SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS: Despite Hezekiah's weaknesses he was a good man and a good king, beloved of his people. When he died, a great funeral cortège followed his coffin and over his grave the people built a house of study where Torah was studied every day. On the lintel over the entrance was carved this verse:

וְהַעֲבִיר אֶת בְּנוֹ בְּאֵשׁ וְעוֹנֵן וְנִחֵשׁ וְעָשָׂה אוֹב וַיִּדְעוֹנִים.

[3] until he filled Jerusalem from one end to another.

The Lord spoke by his servants, the prophets: "Because Manasseh has done

these abominations, [4] I will bring such evil on Jerusalem and Judah that whosoever hears of it, both his ears shall ring. I will wipe Jerusalem as a man

If you would know who is buried here,  
 He who finds rest upon his bier,  
 What were his victories and what his fame,  
 The mass of his treasure, proud sound of his name,  
 Turn to the Torah that stands over his grave,  
 And seek what the Lord asks from king and from slave.  
 Here lies Hezekiah, of Judah the king,  
 Who to the Lord all devotion did bring.  
 Your gold and treasure before death do flee.  
 What is remembered? A good name and charity.

And they put above his grave a *Sefer Torah* and wrote over him:  
 "Whoever lies in this casket fulfilled what is written here."

🕒 [2] MANASSEH DID EVIL: Manasseh was an idolator who served all the pagan gods. He also made a four-faced idol and placed it in the inner court of the Temple so that whatever direction one came in from one could immediately prostrate himself before it. Manasseh also had built another idol which was a colossus, so large that it required a thousand men to move it. Daily Manasseh forced men to drag it from one town to another and daily he had to replace the entire number of men because every evening the men died from their labors.

🕒 [3] MUCH INNOCENT BLOOD: Our Sages tell us that Manasseh sentenced his own grandfather, the prophet Isaiah, to death. When the prophet fled and hid in a hollow tree the king's men saw the edge of his garment exposed and reported it. Manasseh then ordered his men to saw the tree in two and they did so, thereby sawing the

הַנִּיחַוּ סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה עַל מִטָּתוֹ וְאָמְרוּ: קָיָם זֶה מֶה שְּׁכָתוֹב בָּזֶה.

wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.”

Manasseh slept with his fathers, [5] and was buried in the garden of his own

house, and Amon, his son, reigned in his place. He reigned for two years and he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did his father. His servants conspired against

prophet in half. Manasseh was the scourge of other prophets as well, as the verse in Jeremiah (2:30) tells, “Your sword devoured your prophets like a destroying lion.”

❧ [4] MANASSEH’S SINS AND PRAYER: In the twenty-second year of Manasseh’s reign the Assyrians came and carried him off in fetters to Babylonia. There they put him to torture and in his anguish he called upon Baal and Molech and Ashtoreth, on all the pagan idols he had worshiped, to help him, but there was no response. Then he remembered the verses of the Torah his father Hezekiah had taught him: “In distress you shall return to the Lord your God, and you shall find Him if you will seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. For the Lord is merciful” (Deuteronomy 4:29-31). And Manasseh repented and prayed to the Lord, saying, “You are the Lord, Most High, tenderhearted, long-suffering and most merciful. You, God, Lord of the upright, have therefore not ordained repentance for the upright. You have ordained repentance for a sinner like me. I earnestly beseech You, forgive me Lord, forgive me.”

When the angels heard his prayer, they shut the windows of heaven so that his prayer should not be accepted. The angels said to the Lord: “Manasseh put an idol in the inner court of the Temple; he shed seas of innocent blood; he even killed his grandfather, the prophet Isaiah; he is beyond redemption.” And the Lord replied, “Yes, his sins are many and his transgressions great. By applying the law strictly his prayer should not be accepted; but then the people would say that the Lord has shut the door in the face of the penitent. I therefore accept his prayer and his repentance.” And the Lord made an opening under His throne of Glory to receive the prayer of the repentant Manasseh.

אָכְלָה חֲרָבָכֶם גְּבִיאֵיכֶם כְּאַרְיֵה מִשְׁחִית.

him, and killed him. The people of the land killed the conspirators, and his son Josiah became king in his place.

#### JOSIAH AND THE SCROLL

JOSIAH WAS eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the way of David.

In the eighteenth year of King Josiah,

the king sent Shaphan, the scribe, to the House of the Lord, saying: "Go to Hilkiah, the High Priest, and see that he shall take the money which the keepers of the doors have gathered from the people and deliver it into the hands of the workers who have supervision of the House of the Lord, that they may hire the carpenters, the builders, and the masons, to make repairs on the House."

Now when they brought out the money that had been taken to the House

❧ [5] SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS: Rav Ashi appointed a time to lecture to his students about the three sinful kings: Jeroboam, Ahab and Manasseh. "Tomorrow," he said, "we shall discuss our colleague Manasseh." That very night Rav Ashi had a dream in which Manasseh appeared to him and said, "How dare you call me colleague! Do you think you are worthy to be my colleague or my father's? Answer this simple question: 'When we make the benediction of *Hamotzi*, from which part of the loaf of bread must we begin to cut?'"

Rav Ashi replied that he did not know.

Manasseh said, "If you do not know the answer to such a simple question, how dare you call me your colleague?"

Then Rav Ashi said, "Tell me your answer and I shall proclaim it in your name in my lecture tomorrow."

Manasseh said, "We begin to cut the bread from the part that is most browned."

So Rav Ashi asked, "If you were so wise in the laws of the Torah, why did you worship idols?"

Manasseh retorted, "Were you living in my generation you would have lifted the hem of your garment so that you might run faster after the idols to worship them."

אלו הָיִיתָ בְּאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר – הָיִיתָ תּוֹפֵס בְּשׁוּלֵי בִגְדֵי וְרָץ אַחֲרֵי.

of the Lord, Hilkiyah, the priest, found a scroll of the Torah of the Lord given to Moses.

Then Hilkiyah said to Shaphan, the scribe: "I have found the scroll of the Torah [6] in the House of the Lord." Then Shaphan carried the scroll to the king, and said: "Hilkiyah, the priest, has given me a scroll." Then Shaphan read it before the king.

And the king commanded Hilkiyah, the priest, and Shaphan, the scribe: "Go inquire of the Lord for me and for all Judah concerning the words of this book that is found; for great is the anger of the Lord against us, because our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this scroll, to do all in it that is written concerning us."

So Hilkiyah and Shaphan went to Huldah, [7] the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvah. And she

said to them: "Thus says the Lord: Tell the man that sent you to me: Behold, I will bring evil upon this place because they have forsaken Me, and have sacrificed to other gods. My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and it shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the Lord, say to him: The Lord, God of Israel, says: Because your heart was tender and you did humble yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and its people, that they should become an astonishment and a curse, and have rent your clothes and wept before Me, I have also heard you. Therefore, I will gather you to your fathers in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." And they brought back word to the king.

🔗 [6] I HAVE FOUND THE SCROLL OF THE TORAH: Where was the book of Law hidden and who hid it? When King Ahaz burned all the copies of the Torah, the priests hid one book between the lines of bricks in the Temple wall. When the High Priest Hilkiyah, by the command of King Josiah, began to repair the breaches of the walls of the Temple, he found hidden there the Torah of Moses.

🔗 [7] WENT TO HULDAH: Why did they go to Huldah? Jeremiah was also residing in Jerusalem, why did they not go to him?

Some of our Sages believe that the officials went to Huldah because they thought a woman might be more tenderhearted, more ready to forgive the people.

כִּי גְדוֹלָה חֲמַת יְיָ אֲשֶׁר הִיא נִצְתָּה בָּנוּ עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ עַל דְּבַר יְהוָה  
הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל הַכָּתוּב עָלֵינוּ.

#### A COVENANT BEFORE THE LORD

THEN THE KING gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. The king went up to the House of the Lord, together with all the men of Judah, and all the priests and prophets, and all the people small and great, and he read in their hearing all the words of the scroll of the covenant which was found in the House of the Lord.

Then the king stood on a platform, and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and keep His commands, His decrees and His statutes, with all his heart, [8] and with all his soul, and to confirm the words of the covenant that were written in this scroll. And all the people accepted the covenant, and did according to the Covenant of the God of their fathers.

#### JOSIAH'S REFORMS

THEN THE KING commanded the priests to bring out of the Temple of the Lord

all the vessels which were made for the Baal and the Asherah, and he burned them outside Jerusalem, in the limekilns at Kidron. He also did away with those idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to offer sacrifices to the Baal, to the sun, to the moon, and to all the host of heaven. He destroyed the Topheth which was in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, so that no man might make his son or daughter pass through the fire to Molech.

#### THE DEATH OF KING JOSIAH

AFTER JOSIAH restored the Temple, Neco, the king of Egypt, went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went up against him. Pharaoh-neco sent messengers to him saying: "What have I to do with you, Judah? I come not against you this day, but I come to fight another house; and God has commanded me to make haste. Cease to provoke God, who is with me, so that we do not destroy

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🔗 [8] WITH ALL HIS HEART: After Josiah had destroyed the last vestige of paganism and celebrated the Passover properly, he actually made good with his deeds the wrongs which had been committed in his youth. Josiah had come to the throne when he was only eight years old. Now that he was of age, he reexamined all the decisions that had been rendered. "When I judged the people before, did I judge them justly?" He then had a proclamation issued to all the people requesting those who were dissatisfied with his judgments to return

וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית הַנִּמְצָא בְּבֵית יְיָ.



you." But Josiah refused to turn his face away from him. He disguised himself and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. The archers shot at King Josiah, and the king said to his servants: "Take me away for I am badly wounded." His servants took him out of his chariot and made him ride in the second chariot that he had. They brought him to Jerusalem where he died, and he was buried in the sepulcher of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented after him. And all singing men and women mentioned Josiah in their lamentations. And they made an ordinance in Israel to recite the elegy at a stated time of the year.

Then the people took Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place. Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to rule; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. Then [Neco], the king of Egypt, deposed him and fined the land a hundred

talents of silver and a talent of gold. The king of Egypt made his brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Neco took Joahaz, his brother, and carried him away to Egypt.

#### THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM

JEHOIAKIM WAS twenty-five years old when he began to reign. He reigned eleven years in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord. In his days Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up, and Jehoiakim became subject to him for three years. Then he rebelled against him. The Lord sent against him bands of Chaldeans, and bands of Moabites, and bands of Ammonites. He sent them against Judah to destroy it. Then came up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and shackled him in chains to carry him off to Babylon. But Jehoiakim died [9] and his son Jehoiachin became king in his stead.

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before him. Many did, Josiah heard their cases a second time and it turned out that many were justified in their complaints. To each of those Josiah gave a sum of money as recompense so that they might forgive him.

❧ [9] BUT JEHOIAKIM DIED: Jehoiakim was a vassal of Egypt for seven years. When Nebuchadnezzar defeated the army of Egypt, Jehoiakim became a vassal of Babylon. After three years he rebelled and Nebuchadnezzar came and besieged Jerusalem. The Great Sanhedrin then

וַיִּקְוֶן יִרְמְיָהוּ עַל יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ. וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הַשָּׂרִים וְהַשָּׂרוֹת בְּקִינֹתֵיהֶם עַל יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ  
עַד הַיּוֹם. וַיִּתְּנוּם לְחֶק עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

# THE EXILE OF JEHOIACHIN

JEHOIACHIN [10] WAS eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father had done. At that time Nebuchadnezzar,

king of Babylon, came up against the city while his army was besieging it. Jehoiachin went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants, his princes and his officers. The king of Babylon took him captive. He carried out all the treasures of the House

went to Nebuchadnezzar and asked: "Have you come to destroy Jerusalem?" Nebuchadnezzar answered: "No. Jehoiakim rebelled against me. Deliver him and I will return to Babylon."

The Sanhedrin came to Jehoiakim and said: "Nebuchadnezzar demands that we deliver you."

Jehoiakim answered: "Is it right to buy your own life with someone else's life? with mine? Is it not written: 'You shall not deliver an escaped slave to his master?' (Deuteronomy 23:16)."

The Sanhedrin replied that since the time of his ancestor, David, when Sheba, son of Bichri, rebelled against the king, the law was established that any individual who shall transgress the laws of the king and who is specified by name, may be turned over to the enemy in order for the individuals involved to save themselves.

But Jehoiakim refused to submit to the decision of the Sanhedrin and the court then put him in irons and delivered him up to Nebuchadnezzar. But Jehoiakim was a very delicate man and he died immediately. Then Nebuchadnezzar took his corpse and put it into a hollow wooden donkey and paraded the donkey through the cities of Judah, thus fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy (22:19): "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass."

☞ [10] JEHOIACHIN: Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, king over Judah, and then returned to Babylon. There his counselors advised him against having done so. Nebuchadnezzar then returned to Jerusalem and demanded that the Sanhedrin surrender the young king to him or he would destroy the city. The

וַיֵּצֵא יְהוֹיָכִין מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה עַל מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל, הוּא וְאִמּוֹ וְעַבְדָּיו וְשָׂרָיו וְסָרִיסָיו  
וַיִּקַּח אוֹתוֹ מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל.

of the Lord, and all the treasures of the king's house. He also cut to pieces all the vessels of gold, which Solomon, king of Israel, had made in the Temple of the Lord. He also carried into exile the nobles and all the mighty warriors, [11] all the craftsmen and smiths. None was left except the poorest of the people of the land. He exiled to Babylon Jehoiachin, his mother, his wives, his princes and his chief men of the land.

The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his stead; and changed his name to Zedekiah.

#### THE DOWNFALL OF JUDAH

**ZEDEKIAH** WAS twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned

eleven years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done. The anger of the Lord continued against Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out of His presence.

Zedekiah also did not listen to Jeremiah, the prophet, who spoke in the name of the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. Zedekiah became obstinate and stubbornly refused to turn to the Lord, the God of Israel. All the chiefs of the priests and the people sinned mightily. They polluted the House of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem. The Lord sent messengers to them early and late, because He had compassion on His people and

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young king agreed to surrender and all the great scholars and skilled craftsmen were to go into exile with him. Before they surrendered they collected all the keys to the Temple, went to the roof of the Sanctuary and threw the keys up toward heaven, saying, "Lord of the universe, because You have deemed us unworthy to be trustees of Your Sanctuary, here are the keys. Now You keep them." The shape of a fiery hand descended from the heavens and caught the keys, a sign that contact between heaven and earth had been severed.

🔑 [11] ALL THE MIGHTY WARRIORS: It is written that Nebuchadnezzar deported all the men of might, the craftsmen, smiths and heroes who make war. What kinds of heroes were they? Can men in chains make war? Our Sages explained that they were great scholars, leaders and artisans, in truth the real warriors and heroes of the people.

וְהִגְלָה אֶת ... כָּל הַשָּׂרִים וְאֵת כָּל גְּבוּרֵי הַחֵיל ... וְכָל הַחֲרָשׁ וְהַמְּסֻגָּר, לֹא נִשְׁאַר  
זוֹלַת דִּלְת עַם הָאָרֶץ.

on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets. The wrath of God arose against His people till there was no remedy.

It was in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem and besieged it. The city remained under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the [fourth] month, when the famine was very severe in the city so that there was no bread for the people, the wall of the city was breached. The king and all the men of war [fled] by night, by the way of the gate, which was by the king's garden, while the Chaldeans beleaguered the city. The king went in the direction of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him [12] in the plains of Jericho, all his army having scattered from him. They took the king

and brought him before the king of Babylon at Riblah. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and then put his eyes out. They bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

#### THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

IN THE FIFTH month, on the seventh day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guards, a servant of the king of Babylon, to Jerusalem. He burned the House of the Lord, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem. The army of the Chaldeans that were with the captain of the guards, broke down the walls of Jerusalem. The people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the people, Nebuzaradan exiled. He also took away all the vessels of the Temple, and carried them away to Babylon. But

🔗 [12] OVERTOOK HIM: According to legend a secret tunnel ran underground from Jerusalem to the vicinity of Jericho. Through it Zedekiah escaped the besieged city but the Lord was wroth with him for the evil he had done (24:19) and for deserting His people, so He sent a stag to run above the tunnel. The Chaldeans saw the stag with its fine antlers and gave chase. The stag reached the tunnel's opening just as Zedekiah emerged from it and so the Chaldeans leaped upon an even greater prize, the king.

וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֶת בֵּית יְיָ וְאֶת בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת כָּל בְּתֵי יְרוּשָׁלַּיִם.

he left the poorest of the land as vine-dressers and plowmen.

So Judah was carried away captive and exiled out of the land. [13]

#### THE DEATH OF GEDALIAH

OVER THE people who were left Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor. Now when the captains of the forces together with their men heard

that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah governor, they came to Gedaliah in Mizpah. Thereupon Gedaliah swore to them and their men, and said: "Fear not the Chaldean warriors. Dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it will be well with you."

But it was in the seventh month that Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah of the royal house, came with ten men and killed Gedaliah, the Jews and the Chaldeans that were with him in Mizpah.

❧ [13] SO JUDAH WAS EXILED OUT OF THE LAND: When the victorious Nebuchadnezzar led his captives from Judah to Babylon, the deportees of Jeconiah went out to meet the king. They wore white garments, joyful attire, but beneath they wore sackcloth as a sign of mourning for the destruction of the Temple. They met the newly arrived prisoners and asked after their friends and families and were told: "Some died by pestilence, some died by the sword, some died by famine, some you will find among the captives" (Jeremiah 15:2). Then the deportees of Jeconiah raised one hand in salute to Nebuchadnezzar and with the other smote their thighs as a sign of mourning.

[13] SO JUDAH WAS EXILED OUT OF THE LAND: Rabbi Judah said: "See how beloved are little children before God! When the Sanhedrin went into captivity, the *Shechinah*, God's presence, did not accompany them. When the priests went into captivity, God's presence did not accompany them either. But when the children were taken into captivity, the Presence of God went with them, for it says in *Lamentations* (1:5): 'Her children are gone into captivity,' and immediately thereafter (1:6): 'From Zion her splendor [that is, the Presence of God] is departed.'"

וַיָּגַל יְהוּדָה מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָהּ.

Then all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the forces arose and went to Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

#### THE RETURN TO ZION

THOSE WHO escaped from the sword were carried away to Babylon. They were servants to the king of Babylon and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, who issued a proclamation throughout all his

kingdom and put it also in writing, as follows:

"Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heavens, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all His people, the Lord his God be with him, let him go up."

Then rose up the heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites, and all those the spirit of God had roused, to go to build the House of the Lord which is in Jerusalem; they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, every one to his city.

ḤAZAK, ḤAZAK, V'NIT-ḤAZEK

מִי בָכֶם מְכַל עָמוֹ, יִי אֱלֹהֵי עָמוֹ, וַיַּעַל.

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# THE RABBIS' BIBLE

*Volume Three: The Later Prophets*



# THE RABBIS' BIBLE

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## **VOLUME THREE: THE LATER PROPHETS**

*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea,  
Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,  
Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai,  
Zechariah, Malachi*

*by Solomon Simon and Abraham Rothberg*

*illustrations by Devorah Taub and Rachel Hachohen*

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*To the memory of Solomon Simon,  
whose passion for learning was  
in the tradition, and a  
continuation of it.*

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# PREFACE

*Turn it, turn it again and again, for everything is in it.  
Contemplate it, grow gray and old over it, for there is  
no greater good.*

PIRKE AVOT 5:25

THE BIBLE is a world in itself and the books of the great prophets its peaks. In the history of civilizations no voices have spoken more profoundly and passionately of the problems that puzzle men's minds and pain their hearts. In words that scald and solace, stir and soar, the prophets have defended justice, righteousness and mercy against evil, injustice and oppression. They call on men and society to reform, to create and abide by a moral order, to assume the special responsibilities that an ethical life requires; in short, to transcend themselves. If ever men were radical, the prophets are radicals, refusing to countenance war, the oppression of the poor, selfishness, luxury, hypocrisy, cant, and depravity; if ever men were conservative, the prophets are conservatives, for they refuse to surrender freedom and individuality, restraint and responsibility, mercy and compassion, righteous conduct and obedience to law.

Patriots all, theirs was not a blind patriotism. They spoke not only to and for Israel, but to and for all nations. Wherever men and societies have calcified into valleys of dry bones, the prophetic vision breathes life into them, calling on them to live up to that simple, yet most difficult injunction of Micah's:

What does the Lord require of you,  
But to do justly, to love mercy,  
And to walk humbly with your God.

In this volume, an abridged version of the prophetic books is arranged as a continuous text across the tops of pages, with a continuing keyed commentary below. The commentary is meant to illuminate the text from the vast literature of biblical interpretation, including the two Talmudim, the Midrashim, medieval and modern Jewish scholarship, as well as legends and folklore. Text and commentary, each reinforcing and interpreting the other, weave three thousand years of Jewish wisdom into a single strand.

Sometimes the order of verses has been rearranged in the text, to provide a more continuous flow of narrative or argument; and sections of non-prophetic biblical books have been interpolated where they help clarify the historical circumstances in which the prophet spoke. The translation has tried to avoid both archaism and colloquialism in order to maintain the dignity yet convey the clear meaning of the biblical text.

A Teacher's Resource Book is also available to make the complexities and historical setting of the prophetic texts more accessible.

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## 1. ISAIAH [I-10]

### FAITHLESS CHILDREN

THE VISION OF ISAIAH the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham,

Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken: "I have raised and brought up children, [1] but they rebelled against Me. Even an ox

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[1] AND BROUGHT UP CHILDREN: Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir disputed about these verses. Yehudah said that if children are loyal and respectful and obedient, then they deserve to be called children. If they are not, then they should not be called children. Meir declared that even if children are full of fault, rebel and do not conduct themselves as they should, they still remain children to their parents.

*When should a man disown his own children? Ever? When should children disown their parents? Ever? What constitutes loyalty and love, obedience and responsibility?*

בָּנִים גִּדְּלָתִי וְרוֹמַמְתִּי וְהֵם פָּשְׁעוּ בִּי.

knows its owner and a donkey its master's stall; but Israel refuses to know its Lord."

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; and give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah. Of what value to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? [2] I am glutted with burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened beasts, and I do not delight in the blood of bullocks or lambs or he-goats. When you come to see My face, who has asked you to trample My courts? Bring Me no more vain offerings, their smoke is an abomination to Me. Your new moon, your Sabbath and your calling of assemblies—I cannot endure injustice with solemn assemblies.

My soul hates your celebration of the new moon and the festivals; they are a burden to Me. When you spread your hands [in prayer], I will hide Mine eyes from you. Even when you will

offer many prayers, I will not hear because your hands are full of blood. Wash yourself, make yourself clean, put away the evil of your deeds from before Mine eyes. Cease to do evil; learn to do good, [3] seek justice, succor the oppressed, uphold the rights of the orphan and defend the cause of the widow. Then, said the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall become white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall become as wool.

#### JERUSALEM'S MORAL DECAY

HOW HAS the once faithful city become a harlot! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water, your rulers are unruly men and companions of thieves. Every one loves bribes [4] and runs after gifts. They nei-

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🌀 [2] THE MULTITUDE OF YOUR SACRIFICES: *The Lord does not concern Himself with formalities of worship; He hates hypocrisy and insincerity, but loves humility and honesty, justice and mercy.*

🌀 [3] LEARN TO DO GOOD: *Man must not merely eschew evil; he must seek out the good and perform acts of righteousness.*

[4] EVERY ONE LOVES BRIBES: *Bribery and corruption undermine the city's righteousness. Worship of wealth is idolatry. Both debase man.*

לְמַדּוֹ הַיָּטֵב, דָּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט, אֲשֶׁרוֹ חֲמוּץ, שְׁפָטוּ יְתוֹם, רִיבוּ אֶלְמָנָה.

ther uphold the rights of the orphan nor does the cause of the widow come before them.

Therefore, said the Lord, I will take vengeance of My foes. I will turn My hand against you, and I will purge away your dross in the furnace, and take away all your alloy. I will restore your judges as at first and your counselors as in the beginning; afterward you shall again be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed by justice and her inhabitants by righteousness.

Thou hast forsaken your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of diviners from the east and soothsayers like the Philistines, and they indulge themselves in alien customs. Their land is filled with silver and gold and there is no end to their treasures; their land is also full of horses and there is no end to their chariots, [5] so that the land has be-

come full of idols. They worship the work of their hands, that which their fingers have made. Man has sunk low, man has abased himself; and Thou canst not forgive them.

#### THE LORD'S DAY

THE LORD OF HOSTS has a day set against all that is arrogant and haughty, and all that is lifted up shall be brought low, against all the cedars of Lebanon and against all the oaks of Bashan; against the high mountains and all the towering hills, against every high tower and fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish and all the gallant barks. The loftiness of man shall be brought low and the haughtiness of man shall be humbled; and the Lord alone shall be exalted [6] on that day. The idols one and all shall utterly pass away.

On that day man shall cast away to the

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☞ [5] TO THEIR CHARIOTS: *Horses and chariots were the means of war. In worshipping military and material might, man commits idolatry and abases himself.*

☞ [6] THE LORD SHALL BE EXALTED: Rabbi Shimon, the son of Jecho, asks; "When is the Lord's name exalted?" Only when the evildoer is punished by law is the name of the Lord exalted; only when the Lord applies His law through justice is His name exalted.

*The Lord and His law are inseparable; to worship is to obey the commandments and to perform deeds of goodness.*

צִיּוֹן בַּמִּשְׁפָּט תִּפְדֶּה וְשָׁבִיָּהּ בַּצְדָּקָה.

moles and bats his idols of silver and gold which he made for himself to worship; and he shall go into the clefts of the rocks and into the crevices of the crags from the dread presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His majesty when He arises to shake the earth with His might. Stop living in fear of man, [7] in whose nostrils is only breath, for how little is he to be accounted.

#### WARNING TO RULERS

THE LORD RISES to strive against and judge His people. He will bring an indictment against the elders and princes [8] of His people: "It is you that have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. Why do you

crush My people and grind the faces of the poor?"

Therefore, behold, the Lord of hosts will remove from Jerusalem and from Judah every prop and stay: the mighty man, the man of war, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and his elder, the captain of fifty and the counselors. Children I will give them for princes and babes shall rule over them. The people shall oppress one another, every man his fellow and every man his neighbor. The young will behave insolently against the aged and the base man against the honorable.

#### THE HAUGHTY DAUGHTERS OF ZION

THE LORD SAID: Because the daughters

🔥 [7] STOP LIVING IN FEAR OF MAN: *The words that men speak are only wind; fear only the word of the Lord which is the law.*

🔥 [8] THE ELDERS AND PRINCES: If the princes sinned, our Sages ask, how did the elders sin? The Rabbis reply that the Lord brings punishment on the elders because they did not protest the sins of the princes. Even if the elders protested that the princes would have paid them no heed, the Lord says: "Was it revealed to them in advance that their protest would not affect the princes in power?" The duty of the elders was to protest, in the determined hope that their innocence might sway those who exercised power.

*When the poor are plundered and the weak abused, all must protest or society and man will become evil and chaotic.*

מָה לָכֶם תִּדְכְּאוּ עַמִּי וּפְגִי עֲנִיִּים תִּטְחֲנוּ!



of Zion are haughty, they walk with outstretched necks and wanton eyes, mincing as they go and jingling their anklets; therefore the Lord shall smite the daughters of Zion [9] with scabs on the crown of the head and will lay bare their secret parts.

On that day the Lord will take away the finery of their anklets and tiaras, their necklaces, their earrings and their bracelets and their veils; the headties and the armlets, the sashes, the corselets and the amulets; the rings and the nose-jewels; the aprons, the shawls and the

purses; the gauze robes and the fine linen; the turbans and the mantles. And it shall come to pass that instead of sweet scent there shall be stench; instead of a girdle rags and instead of curled hair baldness; and instead of a silk sash sackcloth and instead of beauty the mark of slavery.

Your men shall fall by the sword and your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion shall lament and mourn; and Zion shall sit despoiled upon the earth.

#### THE SONG OF THE VINEYARD [10]

☞ [9] DAUGHTERS OF ZION : *Concentration on luxury, display and decoration are vanity and arrogance. They turn women's heads from righteousness and morality to superficial and sinful concerns.*

☞ [10] THE SONG OF THE VINEYARD : Isaiah tells the simple story of the love of a man for a woman, and her betrayal. But the story is a parable : the wife, the vineyard, which is Judah ; the husband, the owner of the vineyard, the Lord. Because Judah betrayed Him, the Lord will take his protection and support away. Because Judah and Israel have betrayed the Lord ; because all He found in them when He looked for justice was violence, He will finally abandon them.

Our Sages note that the song opens cheerfully and joyfully, and ends with grief and impending doom in seven short thundering prophecies of woe for this disloyal nation.

*The vineyard of Israel shall be left to the savagery and invasion of its enemies, its land shall be ridden by drought and aridity, because violence has smitten righteousness and the oppressed are denied justice.*

וּתְלַכְנָה גִטוּיּוֹת גָּרוֹן וּמִשְׁקֵרוֹת עֵינַיִם, הָלוֹךְ וְטָפוֹף תְּלַכְנָה וּבְרִגְלֵיהֶם תַּעֲכֹסְנָה.

Let me sing for my well-beloved  
 The song of my well-beloved about  
     his vineyard.  
 My well-beloved had a vineyard  
 On a fertile hill.  
 He enclosed it with a hedge,  
 And built a fence around it.  
 He cleared it of stones,  
 Planted it with choicest vines, [11]  
 Built a watchtower in the midst of it  
 And also hewed out a vat therein.  
 He hoped that it would yield good  
     grapes  
 But it yielded sour grapes.  
 Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and  
     men of Judah,  
 Judge, I pray, between me and my  
     vineyard.  
 What more could I have done to my  
     vineyard  
 Than I have done for it?  
 Why then when I expected it to  
     yield good grapes  
 Did it yield sour grapes?

Now let me tell you  
 What I will do to my vineyard :  
 I will take away its hedge,  
 And leave it for the teeth of animals ;  
 I will take away its fence,  
 And it will be trampled down.  
 I will not prune it or hoe it,  
 And it will be overgrown with  
     briers and thorns.  
 I will also command the clouds  
 That they rain no rain on it.  
 Now, the vineyard of the Lord is  
     the house of Israel,  
 And the men of Judah are His cher-  
     ished plantation.  
He looked for Justice, but behold—  
violence ;  
For righteousness, but behold—a  
cry [of the oppressed].

#### WOE TO THE UNRIGHTEOUS

WOE TO THOSE who join house to house  
 and add field to field [12] till there is no

❧ [11] THE CHOICEST VINES : Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish said : Israel is like  
 a vine. Its branches are the aristocracy, its clusters the scholars, its leaves  
 the common people, and its brambles those who are devoid of learning.  
 Let the clusters pray for the leaves, for were it not for the leaves, the  
 clusters could not survive.

❧ [12] FIELD TO FIELD : The prophet was reproving those who foreclosed

וַיִּקְוּ לְמִשְׁפָּט – וְהָיָה מִשְׁפָּח, לְצִדְקָה – וְהָיָה צַעֲקָה.

room [for the poor] in all the land.

Woe to those who rise up early in the morning to run after strong drink, who sit late into the night till wine inflames them. They feast and play the guitar, the tambourine and the flute, but they heed not the work of the Lord and the doings of His hands they see not. Man is brought low but God, the Holy One, is sanctified through righteousness.

Woe to those who draw iniquity upon themselves with slender cords, then they pull sin with cart ropes. [13]

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who change darkness to light and light to darkness; who make bitter sweet and sweet bitter.

Woe to those who are wise in their

own eyes and shrewd in their own sight.

Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and warriors in mixing strong drink; who acquit the guilty for a bribe and take away the right of the righteous from him.

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees and to those who record the decisions of iniquity, who turn aside the needy from judgment, and take away the rights of the poor of My people so that the widow may be their spoil and the orphaned their prey. What will you do in the day of judgment and in the face of the storm which will come from far? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you hide your wealth? [14]

mortgages to take land and houses from those in debt. To these cruel creditors the Lord declared: "Do you think you will become heirs to the land and not My people? You should know that without farmers the land and the houses shall become desolate and the entire country will be ruined."

*Greed and the lust for power in their excesses destroy societies, people and land alike.*

☞ [13] SIN WITH CART ROPES: *Small transgressions attract and lead to greater sins.*

☞ [14] HIDE YOUR WEALTH: *In times of great stress and danger, neither the reed of wealth nor of other men can be leaned upon; only reliance on the Lord sustains.*

הוּי הָאוֹמְרִים לְרַע טוֹב וְלִטּוֹב רָע.

## ISAIAH'S VISION

IN THE YEAR that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a high and lofty throne and His trailing robes filled the Temple. Seraphim stood around Him, each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two did he fly. They called one to the other:

Holy, holy, holy, [15] is the Lord  
of the host;

The whole earth is full of His glory.  
The threshold under the posts shook at

the sound of those who called and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a glowing coal [16] in his hand which he had taken with tongs from the altar; and he touched my mouth with it and said: "This has touched your lips so guilt is removed and your sin forgiven." [17]

Then I heard the voice of the Lord,

✎ [15] HOLY, HOLY, HOLY: *Holiness lies in living uprightly every day. It is more important than religious devotion or prayer, for in righteous life men exalt God more than any angelic choir.*

✎ [16] A GLOWING COAL: The Hebrew word for a glowing or live coal is *ritzpah*. Our Sages declare that the term also means to smash, break or slap (like *ratzetz*). When Isaiah told the Lord that he was a man of unclean lips and living among people of unclean lips, the Lord grew angry and said: "I hate those who slander My children. You may call yourself 'a man of unclean lips,' but how dare you say this of My people! I offered My Torah to all seventy nations of the world and none was willing to accept it; but when I offered it to Israel, all the people cried out in unison (Exodus 19:8): 'All that the Lord has spoken, we will do and obey.' When I made My covenant with them, they also willingly declared (Exodus 24:7): 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey.' And you call them a people of unclean lips?" Then the Lord commanded an angel to slap Isaiah's mouth.

✎ [17] YOUR SIN FORGIVEN: *How do confession and repentance remove guilt*

קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ יְיָ צְבָאוֹת.

saying, “Whom shall I send? [18] Who will go for us?” I answered: “Here am I; send me.”

Then, He said: “Go and say to this people: Indeed you hear but you do not understand. You see but you do not have insight. The heart of the people is fat, [19] their ears are heavy and their eyes are turned away lest they, seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears, and understanding with their heart, repent and be healed.”

Then I said: “Lord, how long?” And He answered: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitants and houses without men, the land left desolate, and the Lord has exiled men far away and the forsaken places be many in the land. Even if a tenth remain in it, it shall be burned up again.

But as a terebinth and an oak when they cast their leaves yet their trunk remains so shall the holy seed be the stock which will be the remnant. [20]

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*and forgive sin? The burning coal of the Lord burns away the dross of loose speech, leaving mouth and spirit purified.*

☞ [18] WHOM SHALL I SEND? After Isaiah was punished for slandering Israel, he heard the voice of God asking who would go to preach to Israel. Quickly, Isaiah said that he would go, but the Lord cautioned: “Beware! Consider! I sent Moses to this people and they vexed and troubled him; and he was afraid they might stone him (Exodus 17:4). I sent them the prophet Amos and they mocked him by calling him ‘the stammerer.’ This rebellious people will insult, despise and persecute you. Before you accept, know and consider the fate of the prophet’s mission.” Isaiah answered: “I accept.” Then the Lord declared: “Because you love justice and righteousness so much that you are willing to suffer for it, I anoint you My prophet.”

☞ [19] THE PEOPLE IS FAT: *Prosperity and comfort had made the people callous, without feeling or compassion.*

☞ [20] THE REMNANT: *Men will not see their own soulless splendor or heartless oppression until they have brought destruction down upon themselves and thus opened their eyes and hearts. Only then shall a remnant be saved.*

אַתְּ מִי אֲשַׁלַּח וְיָלֵךְ לְנוּ? וְאָמַר: הִנְנִי שְׁלָחָנִי.



## 2. ISAIAH [7-30] II KINGS [16] II CHRONICLES [28]

### WAR AGAINST JUDAH

IN THE DAYS OF AHAZ, king of Judah, Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it. When the house of David was told: "Aram is allied with Israel," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before a wind.

Then the Lord said to Isaiah: "Go out

with your son Shear-jashub [1] to the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool on the laundrymen's field and say to Ahaz: Keep calm and be quiet; fear not, neither let your heart be faint because of these two smoking stumps of firebrands, the fierce anger of Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah, king of Israel. They plotted mischief against you, saying: Let us march against Judah, throw it into a panic, break in and seize it, then set up as a king the son of Tabeel." [2] Thus said the

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[1] SHEAR-JASHUB: *The name means "a remnant shall return."*

[2] TABEL: Our Sages say that they examined all Scripture and could

וַיֵּנֶע לְבָבוֹ וּלְבַב עַמּוֹ כְּנוֹעַ עֲצֵי יַעַר מִפְּנֵי רוּחַ.

Lord: "It shall not come to pass. If you do not have faith, you will surely not succeed." [3]

The Lord spoke again [to Isaiah], saying: ["Speak again to Ahaz, saying:] 'Ask a sign of the Lord your God, ask it either from the depth of the underworld or from the high heavens.'" But Ahaz said: "I will not ask, neither will I test the Lord." [4] Isaiah said: "Hear now, house of David, is it not enough for you to weary men that you must weary my God? Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you an omen. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call him Immanuel. [5] Before the

child shall discern between good and evil, the land of the two kings of whom you are in terror will be forsaken. But the Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and your father's house such days as have never been since Ephraim broke away from Judah. He will bring against you the king of Assyria."

It shall come to pass on that day that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. They shall come and swarm, all of them, in the steep ravines and in the clefts of the crags, upon all the thorns and upon all the brambles. And it shall

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find no place called Tabeel. Truly, they believed, the name is made of two words—*toṽ el*—meaning good to people. The kings of Samaria and Aram sent to the people of Jerusalem, saying: "We came to abolish the word of the Lord and to teach ways of idolatry. Now you are under the yoke of the Torah which gives you laws and restricts your life. We will establish paganism, which abolishes all restrictions on the people, so that you may indulge to your heart's desire.

☞ [3] SURELY NOT SUCCEED: *Why doesn't the Lord declare: "If you have faith, you will surely succeed"?*

☞ [4] TEST THE LORD: *So obstinate is Ahaz in his unbelief that he refuses to give credence to the divine origin of Isaiah's prophecy.*

☞ [5] IMMANUEL: *In Hebrew, composed of immanu which means "with us," and el which means "God"; God is with us.*

אִם לֹא תֵאֱמִינוּ, כִּי לֹא תֵאֱמָנוּ.

come to pass on that day that every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels shall be all thorns and thistles. All the [slopes of the] hills that were hoed you shall not be able to go there for fear of briers and thorns. They shall become a place for sending oxen and where sheep may trample. [6]

#### SAMARIA'S DOOM FORETOLD

YET THE PEOPLE turned not to Him who punished them, nor did they seek the Lord of hosts; so the Lord has cut off from Israel head and tail, palm-branch and reed, in a single day. The elders and the men of rank are the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail. The leaders of the people became misleaders and those who were led by them were destroyed. Therefore the Lord will not

spare their young men, for every one of them is godless and an evildoer and every mouth speaks wantonness. [7] For all this His anger has not turned away and His hand is still outstretched to punish them.

Because wickedness burned like fire, it devoured briers and thorns, then kindled the thickets of the forest and they rolled up in columns of smoke. The people were food for the fire. They carved on the right hand but were hungry still; they devoured on the left hand but were not satisfied. Each one devoured his neighbor's flesh, Manasseh Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, while together they fell upon Judah. For all this His anger has not turned away and His hand is still stretched out [8] to punish them.

They have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore, the

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🌀 [6] WHERE SHEEP MAY TRAMPLE: *Assyria (the bee) and Egypt (the fly) will come down from the north and south and devastate Judah between them.*

🌀 [7] EVERY MOUTH SPEAKS WANTONNESS: Our Sages emphasized that speaking obscenely or lewdly was punished severely, not by law but by decree of heaven. Rabbi Hannan said: "All know for what purpose the bride enters the bridal chamber, but he who speaks obscenely of it is severely punished."

🌀 [8] HIS HAND IS STILL STRETCHED OUT: *Because the people have not turned away from their transgressions, the Lord's anger shall not be turned away.*

וְקִין וְנִשְׁוֹא-פָנִים הוּא הָרֹאשׁ, וְנָבִיא מוֹרָה שֶׁקֶר הוּא הַזָּנָב.



anger of the Lord blazed against the people and He stretched forth His hand against them, that the mountains quaked and corpses were like refuse in the midst of the street. In spite of all this, His anger is not turned away and His hand is still stretched out to punish them.

#### THE INSCRIBED TABLET

THE LORD SAID TO ME: "Take a great tablet and write upon it in ordinary script: 'Speeding is the spoil; hastening is the prey. *Maher-shalal-hash-baz.*' And have it attested by two reliable witnesses,

Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah."

Then my wife conceived and gave birth to a son. The Lord said to me: "Call him 'Speeding is the spoil; hastening is the prey—*Maher-shalal-hash-baz.*' For before the child shall know how to say 'My father' and 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria."

The Lord spoke to me again, saying: "Because this people has rejected the waters of Shiloah [9] that flow softly, therefore the Lord will bring upon them the

❧ [9] THE WATERS OF SHILOAH: Rabbi Joshua asked: "How could Sennacherib claim to have God's command to destroy Jerusalem when he said (Isaiah 36:10): 'Did I come up without the permission of the Lord against this land to destroy it?'" Sennacherib took Isaiah's prophecy, "Because this people has rejected the waters of Shiloah, that flow softly, therefore the Lord will bring upon them the waters of the Euphrates, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his host," to be the Lord's sanction to invade Judah.

But the prophet was speaking to the people of Judah who, discontented with the house of David, which ruled gently, like the waters of Shiloah, wanted a stronger ruler. Then the Lord said: "Because you want a strong ruler I shall satisfy your foolish longing by bringing the king of Assyria down upon you. Then you shall have a taste of a truly strong and ruthless tyrant." Why, then, was Sennacherib punished? Because he took the prophet's words, which referred to the Kingdom of Ephraim, as his sanction to destroy Jerusalem.

וְכָתַב עָלָיו בְּחֶרֶט אֲנוּשׁ: לְמָהָר שָׁלַל חֵשׁ בָּז.

waters of the Euphrates, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his host. And he shall fill all the channels and overflow his banks. He shall sweep through Judah, overflowing as he passes through. He shall reach up to the neck, and the stretching of his wings shall fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel."

Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim and the fading flower of his glorious beauty which rests on the heads of those overcome with wine. The Lord has a foe who is mighty and strong, as a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, like a storm of mighty overwhelming water that beats down on the earth with violence. The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trampled under foot. The fading flower of his glorious beauty which rests on the head of the fertile valley will be like the first ripe fig before the summer, which as soon as a man sees it he swallows it while it is still in his hand. But on that day the Lord of hosts shall be a beautiful crown and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people.

#### THE FATE OF SAMARIA AND DAMASCUS

HE WILL RAISE AN ENSIGN to a nation from afar: He will whistle for them from the end of earth, and they will come swiftly and speedily. None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall sleep or slumber. No loin-girdle shall be loosed nor sandal-thong snapped. His arrows are sharp, his bows all bent; their horses' hoofs are like flint, his wheels like a whirlwind. His roar is like that of a lioness. Like young lions will he growl and roar. He will seize his prey and will carry it off, none to rescue.

Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city and will become a heap of ruins; the cities of Aroer shall be forsaken and given over to flocks which shall lie down there and none to make them afraid. The fortresses of Ephraim shall be destroyed and the kingdom of Damascus and the remnant of Aram [10] will perish like the glory of the children of Israel, says the Lord of hosts.

It shall come to pass on that day that the glory of Jacob shall be humbled and

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🔗 [10] THE REMNANT OF ARAM: *The young lions of Assyria will not only seize Judah as their prey but also the surrounding nations who are arrayed against them.*

הוּי עֲטֶרֶת גְּאוֹת שְׂכוּרֵי אֶפְרַיִם, וְצִיץ נֹבֵל צְבִי תִפְאֶרְתּוֹ.

the fat of his flesh grow lean. It shall be as a reaper harvests, collects the reaped corn and cuts down the ears left [so that hardly any are left] standing; so you will be as when one gleans ears in the valley of Rephaim. Or [you will become] as an olive tree shaken so that two or three berries are left on the uppermost branches, four or five on all the boughs, says the Lord, the God of Israel.

In that day shall your fortified cities be deserted like the deserted cities of the Amorites and Hivites which they deserted before the children of Israel. It shall be a desolation, because you have forgot-

ten the God of your salvation and you have not heeded the Rock of your refuge.

Then Ahaz, [11] king of Judah, sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying: "I am your servant and your son; come save me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel who rise up against me." And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house and sent it as tribute to the king of Assyria.

The king of Assyria listened to him

❧ [11] AHAZ: *In Hebrew, Ahaz means to seize, clutch, get hold of.* After his treaty with Assyria, Ahaz wanted the people of Israel to forget the Torah and its commands for justice and righteousness to follow in the way of the Assyrians. Ahaz knew that if he issued such a decree, the people would not only disobey but revolt, so he seized all the schools and academies and forbade teaching and learning Torah. If there were no children to study, he thought, there would be no students in the academies and no Sages; if there were no Sages, there would be no prophets and then no Divine Presence in Israel; and thus would the Israelites become like the Assyrians.

Isaiah thwarted his scheme by gathering around him a group of disciples to whom he taught Torah. They kept the knowledge and teaching of the Law alive until Ahaz died.

*Ahaz's assimilationism was not the first time such a policy was adopted by a ruler, nor the first time it failed. Why do the schools and education become the first and usually most important focus of such efforts?*

עֲבַדְךָ וּבִנְךָ אָנִי, עָלֶיךָ וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי.

and went up against Damascus and captured it, and carried its inhabitants away captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

And in the time of his distress this king Ahaz acted still more treacherously against the Lord, for he sacrificed to the gods of Assyria who were victorious over him, and he said: "Because the gods of the kings of Assyria helped them, therefore will I sacrifice [12] to them that they may help me."

#### A CLOSED BOOK

ALL THE PROPHECIES are to you as the words of a letter that is sealed [13] and which is delivered to one who is learned, saying: "Pray, read this." He will answer: "I cannot read."

[Thus said the Lord:] "Bind the testimony, seal the teaching among My disciples." And I will wait for the Lord

that hides His face from the house of Jacob and I will look for Him. Here I am, and the children whom the Lord has given to me for signs and portents in Israel, from the Lord of hosts who dwells in Mount Zion.

#### A REMNANT SHALL REMAIN

IT SHALL COME TO PASS on that day that the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob shall lean no more for support on the enemy that smote them but shall rely on the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant shall return to God the Mighty. Destruction is decided upon, an act of destruction complete and decisive. The Lord God of hosts is about to execute it in the midst of all the earth. But a remnant of Israel shall be saved because the force of righteousness is overwhelming.

☞ [12] THEREFORE WILL I SACRIFICE: Not only does Ahaz seek to sacrifice Israel's God and faith to Assyria, but its freedom and independence as well. How does one necessarily follow the other?

☞ [13] A LETTER THAT IS SEALED: Every prophet has his own peculiar speech through which he communicates his vision. Its real meaning is often given in figurative and oratorical language, in allegory and parable. Often ordinary readers cannot comprehend such a language, and

שָׁאֵר יָשׁוּב, שָׁאֵר יַעֲקֹב, אֶל אֵל גְּבוּר.

It shall come to pass on that day that the Lord shall raise His hand the second time to redeem the remnant of His people that shall remain from Assyria and from Egypt, from Pathros and from Cush, from Elam and from Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will raise an ensign for all the nations and will assemble the dispersed of Israel and gather together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Then all envy against Ephraim will cease and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off. Ephraim will not envy Judah and Judah shall not be hostile to Ephraim. There shall be a highway [from Assyria] for the remnant of His people that shall remain in Assyria, as there was for Israel on that day when it came up out of the land of Egypt.

#### THE GREAT REDEMPTION

GO, MY PEOPLE, enter your chambers and shut the door behind you. Hide yourself for a little while until the wrath shall pass by. For, behold, the Lord is coming out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sins, The earth shall

uncover the blood shed [in her] and shall no longer cover the slain.

Now go and write it for them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book that it may be for the time to come, for ever and ever. For it is a rebellious people, lying children who refuse to hear the teaching of the Lord, that say to the seers: "See not," and to the prophets, "Prophecy not unto us righteous things. Speak to us of smooth things; prophesy delusions. Get out of the way, turn aside out of the path, and do not trouble us with the Holy One of Israel." Therefore, said the Lord, because you despised My word and have trusted in oppression and crookedness, and relied upon them, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach in a high wall descending and widening. The crash comes suddenly. It breaks like a potter's vessel is broken in pieces so small that there cannot be found among them a shard to take fire from the hearth or to scoop water from the cistern.

It shall come to pass on that day that the Lord will punish the host of high heaven above and the kings of the earth below. They shall be gathered as pris-

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Isaiah therefore complains: "The vision of all has become to you like the words of a letter that is sealed."

וְאִסַּף גְּדֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְנִפְּצוּת יְהוּדָה יִקְבֹּץ מֵאַרְבַּע כְּנָפוֹת הָאָרֶץ.

oners are gathered in a dungeon. They will be shut up in prison for many days and they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before the Elders shall be revealed His glory.

#### DIALOGUE IN THE TEMPLE COURT

[THE PROPHET:] And these also reel with wine [14] and stagger with strong drink. They reel amid their visions and totter

while giving judgment. All the tables are filthy with vomit and no place is clean.

[The elders:] To whom does he impart knowledge? To babes just weaned from milk? To those who have just been taken away from the breast? For it is rule by rule, rule by rule, line by line, line by line, a little here, a little there.

[The prophet replies:] Yes, with stammering lips and an alien tongue shall it be spoken to this people, to whom it was said: This is the rest you shall give to the weary [of war] and this is the refreshing

☞ [14] REEL WITH WINE: A good, pious man had a drunkard for a father. Often when the father was drunk, he fell in the street and was abused by the street urchins. They plucked his beard, called him names, pelted him with stones. When the son saw his father so disgraced and abused, he said: "Father, stay at home and I shall bring you all the best wines and brandies." The father agreed and the son kept his promise.

One rainy day the son was walking in the street and saw a drunkard rolling in the street. The filthy water of the streets had soaked him and jeering boys taunted and beat him. Each time they struck him with a stick or stone he grunted like an animal. The son thought it a good opportunity to show his father how drunkenness humiliated men, and went home and brought his father back to see what was happening. The father looked at the drunkard lying in the gutter, then bent down and whispered in his ear: "Eh, brother, tell me, where did you get such good whisky?"

*Judaism has always blessed the fruit of the vine as a comfort to man's spirit, to be enjoyed, but not to be indulged in to excess and so abused.*

כִּי צוֹ לְצוֹ צוֹ לְצוֹ, קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ, זַעִיר שָׁם זַעִיר שָׁם.

rest. But you would not listen. So the word of the Lord will be to them rule by rule, rule by rule, line by line, line by line, a little here, a little there. They will be like one who walks backward; they shall fall, be broken, snared and captured.

Hear the word of the Lord, the scoffers, rulers of this people in Jerusalem. You said: "We have made a covenant with death [15] and with Sheol we have made an agreement, that when the scouring scourge shall pass through, it shall not reach us. For we have made lies our refuge and we have concealed ourselves under falsehood. Therefore said the Lord God: I will make justice the line and righteousness the plummet; [16] and hail shall shatter the refuge of lies and the waters shall flood the hiding place. Your covenant with death shall be annulled,

your agreement with Sheol shall not stand. When the overwhelming scourge shall pass through, you will be trodden down by it. For the bed is too short for a man to stretch himself and the covering too narrow when he gathers himself up. Therefore scoff no more lest your hands be drawn tighter, for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a sentence of doom, utter and decisive against the whole land.

Because the people draw near Me and honor Me with their mouths and with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. Their reverence for Me is a tradition of men learned by rote; [17] therefore I will deal with this people in a marvelous way and a wonder: The wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the intelligence of their understanding men shall vanish.

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☞ [15] COVENANT WITH DEATH: *Those who live lives of falsehood are condemned to living death. Because their lives are lies they have sealed a covenant with death.*

☞ [16] RIGHTEOUSNESS THE PLUMMET: *The Law shall show the straightness of truth, the crookedness of falsehood.*

☞ [17] LEARNED BY ROTE: *Reverence for God is not acquired by rote but personally, with joy and travail, each and every day.*

בְּפִי וּבִשְׁפָתַי כְּבָדוֹנִי וְלִבִּי רַחֵק מִמֶּנִּי, וְתִהְיֶה יִרְאַתְכֶּם אוֹתִי מִצֹּת אֲנָשִׁים  
מִלְמָדָה.



### 3. ISAIAH [14-37]

#### THE FALL OF A TYRANT

HOW HUSHED is the tyrant! How still is the terror! The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of the rulers who smote the peoples in wrath with incessant strokes, that ruled the nations in anger with a persecution that none restrained. [1] The whole earth is at rest and is quiet. All the people of the earth break forth into song. The cypresses rejoice at

your fate and the cedars of Lebanon [say]: "Since you were laid low, no woodsman comes to fell us."

Sheol was in turmoil to meet you at your coming; the shades were roused for you, all the chief ones of the earth, all the kings of nations, were raised up from their thrones. All of them cried out and said to you: "So you too have become weak as we are? Your pomp has been brought down to the grave, and the din

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[1] A PERSECUTION THAT NONE RESTRAINED: *Tyranny, persecution, the rule of rage and terror shall forever cease.*

נָחָה שְׁקֵטָה כָּל הָאָרֶץ, פָּצְחוּ רִנָּה.



of your harps. Beneath you maggots are spread and the worms cover you.”

How you did fall from heaven, O shining star of the dawn! How you were cut down to the ground, you that cast lots over the nations! You said in your heart: “I will ascend unto heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit on the mount of God in the uttermost part of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds and will be like the Most High.” [2] But you were brought down to the netherworld, to the bottom of the pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, look at you closely, and say: “Is this the man [3] that made the earth tremble, that did shake kingdoms, that made the world a wilderness, destroying its cities, that never opened the doors of his prisons?”

All the kings of the nations, all of them, sleep in glory, every one in his own house. But you are flung out of your sepulcher like an abhorred offshoot, in the garments in which you were slain, thrust through with the sword.

You shall not be joined with them [the kings] in burial because you have destroyed your land and slain your people. The descendants of the evildoers shall never be renowned.

My heart is bewildered, terror has overwhelmed me; the night of my pleasure He has turned into trembling. They prepared a table, lit the lamps, ate and drank, [when suddenly the outcry]: “Rise up, princes, and anoint the shields!” The watchman that was set was told: “What you see, call out.” He saw a troop of horsemen in pairs, a troop of donkeys, a troop of camels, and he obeyed diligently. He called: “There comes a troop of men, horsemen in pairs.” Then he cried out: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods are shattered to the ground.”

#### MOAB AND TYRE

IN A NIGHT Ar-Moab was laid waste; in a night Kir-Moab was brought to ruin. In their streets they have girded on sack-

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🕒 [2] LIKE THE MOST HIGH: *Man is exalted but not deified. Overreaching can only bring man disaster, for despite his grandeur he is frail and fallible.*

🕒 [3] IS THIS THE MAN: *The tyrant is also a man and only a man; he can be brought down from the highest to the lowest estate in a night.*

אֵיךְ נִפְלְתָּ מִשָּׁמַיִם, הַיָּלִל בֶּן שָׁחַר, נִגְדַעְתָּ לָאָרֶץ – חוֹלֵשׁ עַל גּוֹיִם!

cloth; on their housetops and in their squares everyone wails and weeps profusely. My heart cries out for Moab; her fugitives reach to Zoar. Her cry of distress has gone round the borders of Moab and her howl reaches Eglaim, even as far as Beer-elim.

Howl, you ships of Tarshish, for your harbor is laid waste. On their way, in the land of Kittim, it was revealed to them. You are confounded. O Zidon; for the sea, the stronghold of the sea, has spoken: "I am as if I have not travailed, nor given birth to children, nor brought up maidens. When the report reaches Egypt, they shall writhe in pain at the news of Tyre. Is this the joyous city whose feet from ancient times carried her so far to sojourn? Who has devised this against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants were princes and whose traders the honored of the earth? The Lord of hosts devised it to abase the haughtiness of all glory, to bring into contempt all [those] honored of the earth.

And it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years. At the end of seventy years, the Lord will remember Tyre and she will return to her strength and shall have commerce with all the kingdoms upon the face of the earth. But her gain from

her commerce shall be dedicated to the Lord. It shall not be stored up nor hoarded, but will be given over to those who dwell in the presence of the Lord, for them to eat their fill and for stately clothing.

#### NAKED AND BAREFOOT

IN THE YEAR that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, the Lord spoke to Isaiah, saying: "Go and untie the sackcloth from your loins and put off the sandals from your feet." And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said: "My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and symbol upon Egypt and Ethiopia, that the king of Assyria shall lead the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot to the shame of Egypt." And the inhabitants of this land shall say on that day: "Behold, this is the fate of those on whom we set our hope and to whom we fled for help to save us from the king of Assyria; how can we escape?"

Woe to them who bury their plans deeply from the Lord, and their work is done in the dark, and they say: "Who

כִּי לַיּוֹשְׁבִים לִפְנֵי יְיָ יִהְיֶה סִחָרָה לְאָכֹל לְשִׂבְעָה.

sees us? Who knows us?" [4] Woe to the rebellious children, says the Lord, who take counsel but not of Me; and that make alliances, but not according to My wish. They go down to Egypt without asking My counsel, to take refuge in the stronghold of Pharaoh, and to take shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the stronghold of Pharaoh turn to shame and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to confusion. His princes are at Zoan and his ambassadors have come to Hanes. But they shall all be ashamed of a people that cannot benefit them, that bring no help, but are a shame and a disgrace.

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses and trust in chariots, because they are many, and in horsemen, because they are very mighty; but they look not to the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord. Yet Egyptians are [mere] men and not God; and their horses flesh and not spirit, [5] so when the Lord shall stretch out His hand, both he who helps will stumble and he

who is helped will fall, and they shall perish together.

#### THE INVASION OF SENNACHERIB

NOW, IN THE FOURTEENTH YEAR of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. Then Hezekiah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying: "I have sinned. Withdraw from me and whatever you put on me, I will bear." The king of Assyria made Hezekiah pay three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

Afterward the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rab-saris and Rab-shakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a great army to Jerusalem. They came and took up their position at the channel of the upper pool and they called out for the king. There came out to them Eliakim, who was the steward of the palace, Shebna, the scribe, and Joah, the recorder.

Then Rab-shakeh said to them: "Say

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☞ [4] WHO KNOWS US: *Conspiracy of any kind—personal, religious, political—is to be abhorred; but the most dangerous conspiracy of all is between nations.*

☞ [5] FLESH AND NOT SPIRIT: *Flesh must rely on spirit; reliance on military and material might must inevitably fail.*

וְהָיָה לָכֶם מֵעוֹז פֶּרֶעָה לְבִשָּׁת וְהֶחֱסוֹת בְּצֵל מִצְרַיִם לְכָל־מָה.

you now to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: What confidence is this in which you trust? Do you think that a mere word of the lips is counsel and strength for war? Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against Me? You have put your trust in Egypt, in the staff of this bruised reed, on which if a man leans, it will run into his hand and pierce it. But if you say to me, We trust in the Lord our God; is it not the Lord whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah: Worship at this altar in Jerusalem? Have I marched against this place to destroy it without God's sanction? For God said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it. So, make a wager with my master, the king of Assyria. I will give you two thousand horses if you have the riders to set upon them. So you can then

repulse the attack of the least of my master's servants."

Then Eliakim, Shebnah, [6] and Joah said to Rab-shakeh: "Speak to us in Aramaic, for we understand it, but do not speak to us in Judean with the people listening on the wall."

Rab-shakeh answered them: "Did my master send me with this message to your master or to you? It was rather to the men who are sitting on the wall and die of hunger." Then he stood and cried with a loud voice in Judean, saying: "Here the words of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus says the king: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. Have any of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Was Samaria delivered out of my hand? Make peace with me and surrender to

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❧ [6] SHEBNAH: Shebnah was an important nobleman and great scholar in Jerusalem. When Sennacherib besieged the city, Shebnah shot an arrow into the Assyrian camp with a note attached which read: "Shebnah and his followers are willing to conclude peace. Hezekiah and his followers are not." When he heard this, Hezekiah was afraid and said: "Perhaps the mind of the Holy One, blessed be He, is with the majority and since they would surrender we must do likewise." Whereupon Isaiah came to him and reassured him: "Shebnah's is a conspiracy of the wicked, and as such cannot be counted upon in making a just decision."

*The decision of the majority is frequently neither ethical nor courageous.*

מָה הַבְּטָחוֹן הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּטָחָתָּ?

me. Then each man can eat from his own vine and from his own fig tree, and drink water from his own cistern, [7] until I come and take you away to a land like your own, that you may live and not die."

The people were silent and answered not a word, for the king commanded: "Do not answer him."

#### THE PROPHET'S REASSURANCE

THEN KING HEZEKIAH rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and sent Eliakim and Shebna, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz. They said to him: "Thus said Hezekiah: 'This is a day of trouble, rebuke, and disgrace. It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of Rab-shakeh whose master, the king of Assyria, has sent him to insult the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard.'"

Isaiah said to them: "Thus shall you say to your master: Thus said the Lord: Do not be afraid of the words of the ser-

vants of the king of Assyria who have blasphemed Me. He shall not enter the city, nor shoot an arrow there; neither shall he come before it with a shield, nor cast a mound against it. For I will defend and save the city for My own sake and for the sake of My servant David."

#### ASSYRIA ON THE MARCH

He has come to Ai,  
He has passed through Migron;  
At Michmas he left his baggage;  
He has crossed the pass;  
In Geba he has taken up his lodging;  
Rama has trembled;  
Gibeath-Shaul has fled.  
Cry out with a shrill voice, O daughter of Gallim!  
Hearken, O Laish, O you poor Anathoth!  
Madmenah is in mad flight;  
The inhabitants of Gebim fled to cover.  
This very day he will halt at Nob,  
Shaking his fist at the Mount of Zion,  
The hill of Jerusalem.

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❧ [7] HIS OWN CISTERN: *Demagogues promise all things to all men, but can not, nor can they expect to, fulfill their promises.*

לֹא יָבוֹא אֶל הָעִיר הַזֹּאת וְלֹא יִזְרֶה שָׁם חֶץ.

## ASSYRIA'S ARROGANCE

O ASHUR, the rod of My anger, the staff of My fury, I sent him against an ungodly nation. I sent him against the people of My wrath. I charged him to spoil them and prey upon them and to trample them down like mud in the streets. But he does not think so, nor does his heart so devise; but destruction is in mind and to cut off nations, not a few. For he says: "Are not My princes all of them kings? Is it not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hammoth like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? Shall I not do to Jerusalem and its images as I have done to Samaria and its idols?" He said: "By the strength of my hand I have done it and by my wisdom, for I have understanding. I have removed the boundaries of peoples and have plundered their treasures and have brought down the mighty. My hand has reached into the wealth of the people as into a nest, as one gathers eggs that are forsaken; I have gathered the whole earth and there was not one that fluttered a wing, nor opened the mouth, nor chirped.

Should the ax vaunt itself against him that cuts with it, or the saw magnify itself against him that moves it? It is as if a

rod should swing him that lifts it up, or like the staff raising him that is not wood. Therefore, the light of Israel shall become a fire and the Holy One of Israel a flame; and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers and the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field he will consume. And the remnant of the trees of his forest shall be so few that a child may write them down.

## ASSYRIA'S PUNISHMENT

IT SHALL COME TO PASS that when the Lord has finished all His work on the Mount of Zion and Jerusalem, He will punish the arrogance of the king of Assyria and his vainglorious pride.

The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying: Surely as I have planned, so shall it come to pass; and as I have made it My purpose so shall it stand that I will break Ashur in My land, and trample him on My mountains. This is the plan I planned upon the whole earth; and this is the hand stretched out against all the nations. The Lord of hosts has made it His purpose, who shall annul it? And His hand is stretched out, who shall turn it back?

This is the word which the Lord has

הִתְפָּאֵר הַגִּבּוֹר עַל הַחוּצָב בּוֹ, אִם יִתְגַּדֵּל הַמִּשּׁוֹר עַל מְנִיפּוֹ?

spoken against Sennacherib: The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and laughs you to scorn. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you. Whom have you insulted and blasphemed, against whom have you raised your voice and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants you have taunted the Lord and have said: With the multitude of my chariots have I ascended the height of the mountain, to the innermost parts of Lebanon; and I have cut down the tall cedars and the choicest cypresses. I have digged and drunk foreign waters, and with the soles of my feet I have dried up all the rivers of Egypt.

#### THE LORD'S DECREE

HAVE YOU NOT HEARD how I prepared it long ago, fashioned it in ancient times? Now have I brought it to pass that you should turn fortified cities into ruins. Therefore, their inhabitants were of little power and they were dismayed and confused; they became like grass in the

field, like tender herbs and like grass on the housetops.

I know your sitting and rising, your going out and your coming in and your raging against Me. Because you have raged against Me and your arrogance has come up into My ears, therefore will I put My hook in your nose [8] and My bridle in your lips, and I will return you back by the way which you came.

The Angel of the Lord went forth and slew in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty-five thousand. When men arose early next morning, they saw all around them dead bodies. So Sennacherib, King of Assyria, departed and returned home and dwelt at Nineveh. It came to pass that as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch, his god, his sons killed him.

#### ISAIAH'S VISION OF THE END OF DAYS

IN THAT DAY there shall be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians shall come into Egypt and the Egyptians shall

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🔗 [8] MY HOOK IN YOUR NOSE: *The Lord will take Assyria like an animal, hook in the nose and bridle in the mouth, and bring it to heel.*

אֶת מִי חֲרַפְתָּ וְגִדַּפְתָּ וְעַל מִי הָרִימוּתָּה קוֹל?

come into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall worship [the Lord] with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third [member of the league] with Egypt and Assyria in the midst of the earth; for the Lord of hosts has blessed them: "Blessed be Egypt, My people, and Assyria, the work of My hands, and Israel, My inheritance."

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all the people a feast of fat things and feast of wine on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the veil that covers all the nations. He will swallow up death [9] for ever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from every face. And He will remove from all the

earth the reproach of His people, for the Lord has spoken it.

The people that walked in the darkness have seen a great light. On them that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death has the light shone. For every boot worn by a warrior and every war cloak rolled in blood shall be burning fuel for fire. For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us, and the government shall be on his shoulders and his name shall be called, "Wonderful in Counsel, God the Mighty, Everlasting Father, the Ruler of Peace." Great will be his dominion and endless the peace upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom,

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❧ [9] HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH: In the happy days to come, Rabbi Joshua said, "Death will be abolished for all the world's people, Jews and Gentiles alike." The Lord will produce ten miracles: 1. The light of the moon shall equal the light of the sun. 2. A living spring in Jerusalem will cure all the sick who bathe in it. 3. Fruit trees will bear fresh fruit every month and their fruit will be healing medicines. 4. There will be no more abandoned or destroyed cities; even Sodom and Gomorrah will be rebuilt. 5. All nations will recognize the glory of the people of Israel. 6. The cow and bear shall feed together. 7. The Lord shall gather all the beasts, birds and creeping things and make a covenant with them not to hurt people or each other. 8. Weeping, wailing and sighing will be heard no more. 9. Death will be abolished. 10. All men will rejoice and be happy.

*At the end of days all men will have health, peace, happiness and everlasting life.*

הָעַם הַהוֹלָכִים בַּחֹשֶׁךְ רָאוּ אֹרֶךְ יָדוֹל.



to establish it and to uphold it, through justice and through righteousness from henceforth and for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

#### THE MESSIANIC AGE

THE PROPHECY that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountains of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people will go and say, "Come, you, let us go up to the mountains of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between nations and decide for many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning

hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

A shoot will come forth from the stem of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by that which his eyes see nor decide by that which his ears hear. But with righteousness shall he judge the poor and with fairness decide for the oppressed of the land. He shall smite the guilty of the land with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins.

Then a wolf shall dwell with the lamb [10] and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. The calf and the young lion will graze together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall be friends and their young ones shall lie

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❧ [10] DWELL WITH THE LAMB: Rabbi Simeon said: It is written: "And will cause evil beasts to cease out of the land" (Leviticus 26:6). The Lord will not destroy the beasts; instead he will change their natures so that they no longer hurt or destroy. Thus will the Lord's greatness be manifest.

*At the end of days physical and human nature will be transformed so that pain and destruction will cease forever.*

וְכַתְּתִי חֶרְבוֹתָם לְאֵתִים וְחַנִּיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמֵרוֹת, לֹא יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.

down together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox; and the infant shall play on the hole of the asp, and the baby shall put his hand into the viper's nest. They shall

not hurt nor destroy [11] on all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as waters cover the sea.

❧ [11] THEY SHALL NOT HURT NOR DESTROY: Brigands in the neighborhood afflicted the community of Rabbi Meir so grievously that the rabbi finally prayed for their deaths. His wife, Beruria, rebuked him, saying: "How can you permit yourself such a prayer! Is it written, 'Let *hattaim* (sins) cease' or 'Let *hotim* (sinners) cease'? It is written *hattaim*, sins, not *hotim*, sinners. Psalms (105:35) says, 'And let the wicked be no more'; since the sins will cease, there will be no more wicked men. Therefore, instead of praying for the brigands to die, pray for them to repent!"

So rebuked, the rabbi did pray for the brigands, they repented, and ceased to afflict the community.

*Punishment may destroy evil but repentance transforms it to good.*

כִּי מִלְאָה הָאָרֶץ יִדְעָה אֶת יְיָ כַּמִּים לַיָּם מְכַסִּים.



## 4. ISAIAH [40-60]

### COMFORT THE PEOPLE

COMFORT, O COMFORT [1] MY PEOPLE, says  
the Lord. Bid Jerusalem take heart and

tell her that her time of suffering in exile  
is ended, that her guilt is paid in full, that  
she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for her sins.

[1] COMFORT, O COMFORT: The Lord said: "The time has come to redeem My children from the suffering of the exile in Babylonia. But first I shall send My prophets to comfort them." The prophets gathered and were sent to comfort the children of Israel and assure them of the prospect of a golden future. But the congregation of Israel (*keneset yisrael*) replied: "We have had our fill of your rebuke and chastisement. Your comforting words are empty and barren."

The prophets returned to the Lord and told Him that the people refused to be comforted, so the Lord said, "I Myself must comfort them." Then the Lord went to the congregation of Israel and asked why

נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי, יֹאמַר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

Ascend a high mountain, Zion, herald  
of glad tidings; raise your voice loudly,  
Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift up,

be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah:  
"Behold your God!" The Lord God will  
come as a Mighty One, His arm will

they would not be comforted. They answered: "Are we not right to be  
angered? You exiled us, scattered us among the nations. You cursed us  
most vehemently. We have been oppressed, persecuted and humiliated  
by even the lowest of nations. Still we sanctified Your name even in  
exile. We did not reject You."

The Lord replied, saying: "You were not punished in vain. You  
transgressed My laws. Is it not written: 'Whoever sheds man's blood,  
his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God was man made'?"

The congregation of Israel replied: "When You exiled us among the  
nations, You broke the covenant. We are no longer Your sons. In exile  
we observed Your Sabbath and did not break any of Your command-  
ments. We did not reject You; You rejected us."

Then the Lord said: "I will redeem you from among the nations and  
punish the nations who oppressed you. And I will be to you like a  
brother."

The congregation of Israel spoke to the Lord: "You may be a broth-  
er to us, but will it be as Cain was to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac and Esau  
to Jacob?"

"I will be to you as Joseph was to his brothers," the Lord said. "De-  
spite what his brothers did to him, Joseph did not hate them, but showed  
them great consideration and compassion. As it is written (Genesis  
50:21): 'Fear me not, I will feed and sustain you and your children,  
and he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.'" Such a brother will  
the Lord be to you. Be comforted, My people."

Then the congregation of Israel was comforted.

*The people of Israel dare to enter a dialogue with the Lord, to question God  
about whether He has fulfilled His obligations to man and community.*

אִמְרֵי לְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה: הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם!

rule. His reward [to the righteous] lies with Him [2] and His recompense [for their good deeds] is from Him. Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, with His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead the nursing ewes.

Zion said: "The Lord has forsaken me, [3] the Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget the child she nurses that she should not have compassion on the child she has born? Yes, even a mother may forget, but I will not forget you. I have graven you upon the palms of My

❧ [2] HIS REWARD LIES WITH HIM: *Secharo*, reward, and *pe'ulato*, recompense, are different forms of repayment. Reward is often delayed; recompense is immediate payment. The righteous cannot expect to see the reward of their deeds immediately. Righteous deeds are intended to bring about change in the world, and their effects are slow and cumulative, and may not be evident for generations. The wrongdoer often succeeds in seeing the fruit of his work swiftly; he is recompensed, requited, paid in full. He sees immediate results because he intends to leave nothing useful for the generations to come.

❧ [3] THE LORD HAS FORSAKEN ME: The Rabbis asked whether to be forsaken is not the same as to be forgotten, and Resh Lakish replied: The congregation of Israel said to the Holy One: "Sovereign of the Universe, when a man takes a second wife, he still remembers the love of his first wife, the companion of his youth. But You have both forsaken and forgotten us." The Holy One answered: "There is no forgetfulness before the Throne of My Glory. I remember your days in the desert, your great devotion and trust in Me."

Then the congregation of Israel said to Him: "Since there is no forgetfulness before You, perhaps You will not forget the time we made the golden calf and exclaimed: 'This is your God, O Israel.'"

The Lord promised: "That will be forgotten."

Israel said: "Since there is some forgetfulness before You, perhaps

הַתְּשַׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עוֹלָה, מֵרַחֵם בֶּן בְּטוּהָ?

hands; your walls [of Jerusalem] are always before Me.

Lift up your eyes, [look] around you and see: All of them gather themselves together and come to you. Your lost children shall yet say to you: "The land is too small to hold us; give us a little place so that I may live there." Then shall you say to yourself: "Who has begotten all these for me? I was bereaved and alone, exiled and wandering. Who has reared these [my children]? I was left alone. Where did they come from?" So said the Lord: "I will lift up My hand to the nations and I will give them a signal; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom and they shall carry your daughters on their shoulders."

#### CYRUS, THE ANOINTED OF THE LORD

THUS SAYS THE LORD to his anointed, Cyrus, whose right hand I grasp, subduing nations before him, and making kings run in his service, opening doors before him and leaving the gates unbarred: I

will give you treasures out of the darkness, and riches that have been hidden away, that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel who calls you by name. For the sake of Jacob My servant, of Israel My chosen one, I say of Cyrus: My shepherd who fulfills My every wish, he shall say of Jerusalem, "Let her be rebuilt," and of the Temple, "Let its foundations be laid."

#### THE IN-GATHERING OF EXILES

WHO ARE THOSE that fly like clouds and like doves to their cotes? Surely the people of the Islands are waiting with their ships of Tarshish to bring your sons from afar, their silver and gold with them, in honor of your God, because He has glorified you. Aliens shall build your wall and their kings shall minister to you. In My wrath I punished you; but in My mercy I had compassion on you.

Sing, O you heavens, for what the Lord has done! Shout, O depths of the earth! Break into song, you mountains,

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You will forget our conduct at Sinai when You revealed Yourself and declared: 'I am the Lord your God.'"

"That," the Lord declared, "will not be forgotten."

*To forget is to lose the recollection of something or to put it out of one's memory. To forsake is to renounce something dear to one. How does the Lord promise to forget but not to forsake?*

עוד יאמרו באֲזִנִּיךָ בְּנֵי שְׂכֻלֶיךָ: צַר לִי הַמָּקוֹם, נִשָּׂה לִי וְאַשְׁבָּה.

you forest and every tree in it; for the Lord has redeemed Jacob and glorifies Himself in Israel.

Arise, shine for your light has come.  
The glory of the Lord has risen and shone upon you. Darkness still covers the earth and gross darkness envelops the people; but upon you the Lord will shine forth and His glory shall be seen upon you. Nations shall walk by your light and kings by the brightness of your glow.

Who hath wrought and done it? He that called the generations from the beginning. I, the Lord, who am the first, and with the last am the same. The isles saw and feared; the ends of the earth trembled; they drew near and came.

Go forth from Babylon. Flee from the Chaldeans. With a voice of singing, declare, tell, speak this even to the end of the earth. Say: "The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob."

#### THE IMAGE WORSHIPERS

TO WHOM WILL YOU COMPARE GOD? [4]  
To what image will you liken Him? To the image which a craftsman has cast and a goldsmith covered over with gold and a silversmith adorned with silver chains? To whom then will you liken Me that I should be equal? says the Holy One.

One artisan helps the other. Every one says to the other: Be diligent. The crafts-

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❧ [4] TO WHOM WILL YOU COMPARE GOD: The Torah and prophets explicitly state that the Lord is not corporeal. Maimonides states that it is written: "God is in heaven above and upon earth below" (Deuteronomy 4:39). A corporeal being cannot be in two places at the same time. It is also written: "For you saw no image, no form of any figure" (Deuteronomy 4:15).

If the Lord had a body it would be possible to compare Him to other bodies. If this is so, why does the Torah, in speaking of the vision of God granted to the Elders of Israel, state: "Under His feet was a floor of sapphire and like the heavens themselves for brightness" (Exodus 24:10)? And why are there similar references to God's hands, ears, and so on? Maimonides explains that all such passages are designed for those people who can only grasp what is concrete so that Scripture speaks as human beings can understand.

קוּמִי אוֹרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרֶךְ וְכָבוֹד יִי עָלֶיךָ זָרַח.

man encourages the goldsmith; he that smooths with a hammer encourages him who strikes the anvil and says to the soldier: "It is good." And fastens it with nails so that it should stand firm. He chooses an oak [5] tree which does not rot. Then he seeks a skillful craftsman to set up an image that shall not reel.

The smith makes an ax, he works it over the coals, fashions it with hammers. He works with his strong arm, [he does not eat] even when he grows hungry and loses strength. He does not drink any water and he grows faint. The wood worker draws a measuring line. He marks it out with a pencil, works on it with planes and shapes it into the likeness of a man, like a man beautifully adorned, to sit in the god's house.

Or a man goes and cuts himself a cedar. He plants himself a tree and the

rain makes it grow. The man uses part of it for fuel. He kindles a fire, warms himself, bakes bread [on its coals]. From what is left he then makes a god and prostrates himself before it. Half of it he burned in the fire and in its embers he roasted meat. He ate the roast, was satisfied and also warmed himself, exclaiming: "Aha, I am warm, I feel the fire." Before the rest, of which he made the idol, he prostrates himself, worships it, prays to it, saying: "Save me, for you are god." They know not, neither do they understand, for their eyes are bleared [6] and they cannot see, and their hearts cannot understand to say: "Half of it I used as fuel and on its embers I have baked bread, roasted meat and eaten it. How can I make the rest of it an abomination and prostrate myself before a block of wood?"

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🔗 [5] HE CHOOSES AN OAK: *Idolatry is the worship of the work of man's hands, however skillful.*

🔗 [6] THEIR EYES ARE BLEARED: Reb Yehudah has written that generations of mankind who do not as a rule learn from the experience of previous generations have their eyes bleared. The generation of the Deluge did not learn from the generation of Enoch, when the Lord had flooded a third of the world as a warning to the people for their transgressions.

יִסְגְּדוּ-לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ וַיִּתְּפְּלֵל אֱלֹהֵי וַיֹּאמֶר: הַצִּילֵנִי כִּי אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָהּ.



## THE LORD'S PEOPLE AND HOUSE

## OPEN TO ALL

LET NOT THE ALIEN SAY, when he would join himself to the Lord: "The Lord will surely exclude me from His people." For the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, ministering to Him, loving the name of the Lord, and becoming His servants, all who keep the Sabbath free from profanation and hold to My covenant, I will bring them to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt-offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel: others will I gather to him besides those already gathered.

## THE VANITY OF GRAVEN IMAGES

LET THEM BRING THEM FORTH and declare to us the things that shall happen; the former things, what are they? Declare you that we may consider and know the end of them; or announce to us things to come. Declare the things that are to come hereafter that we may know you are gods. Yes, do good or do evil that we may be dismayed and behold it together. Behold, you are nothing and your work a thing of nought. An abomination is he that chooses you. Their works are vanity and nought; their molten images are wind and confusion.

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last, and beside Me there is no God.

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The people of Sodom and Gomorrah did not learn anything from the generation which built the Tower of Babel, and that was a great surprise because then all mankind spoke a single language and could easily communicate one with the other. Yet that generation too made the same mistakes as their predecessors.

*Blindness of self-love and self-involvement are themselves idol worship; they worship the present and the self, and therefore cannot learn from others or from the past, and so cannot change the future or themselves.*

אֲנִי רֹאשׁוֹן וְאֲנִי אַחֲרוֹן, וּמִבְּלִעְדֵּי אֵין אֱלֹהִים.

## CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

KNOW YOU NOT? Hear you not? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He that sits above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; He that brings princes to nothing. He makes the judges of the earth as a thing of nought. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely are they sown, scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth; when He blows upon them and they wither, and the whirlwind takes them away as stubble. To whom then will you liken Me, that I should be equal? says the Holy One.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is passed over from my God?" Have you not known that the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not faint nor is weary? His discernment is past searching out. He gives power to the faint; and to him that has no might he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall walk and not faint.

## MAN IS GRASS

WOE TO HIM that strives with his Maker, as a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him that fashions it: "What are you making?" Or: "Your work, it has no hands?" Woe to him that says to his father: "Why do you beget?" Or to a woman: "Why do you labor so?"

Hark! one says: "Proclaim!" And I said: "What shall I proclaim? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades; because the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people is grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God shall stand forever."

Thus says the Lord: I, even I, have made the earth, and created man upon it, even My hands have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have roused him up in victory, and I make level all his ways. He shall build My city, and he shall let My exiles go free, nor for any price or reward. O, Israel, that are saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation: You shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.

יְבֹשׁ חֲצִיר, נָבֵל צִיץ, וְדִבַּר אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם.

## THE HIDDEN GOD

I AM THE LORD and there is none else. Beside Me there is no god. I have strengthened you though you are not aware of Me, so that they may know from the rising sun and from the west that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness. [7] I make peace and create evil, I am the Lord that does all those things.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor My ways your ways, says the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your

ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Truly, You are a hidden God, [8] but You are also the God of Israel, the Savior.

Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let them return to the Lord and He will have compassion upon them. Return to our God because He pardons abundantly.

Thus said the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place but I am with him that is conscience

☞ [7] I FORM THE LIGHT AND CREATE DARKNESS: Rabbi Hezekiah says that the command for peace is greater than any other *mitzvah* in the Torah. Darkness and light are the basis of creation, and peace is as important as both of them. Peace is so great it balances all creation. Of all other commands it is written, "If you chance," or "If you see," so that "If you chance upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you must be sure to lead it home" (Exodus 23:4). In short, if you see it, you must obey the command; but if you don't, you need not seek out the opportunity. But about peace it is written: "Seek peace and pursue it in any other place, everywhere."

☞ [8] YOU ARE A HIDDEN GOD: *Man can never know God, although he must forever strive to do so. In remaining a hidden God, the Lord keeps men from making an idol of Him.*

אָבן אַתָּה אֵל מְסֻתָּת, אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ.

stricken and humble in spirit, [9] to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the penitent.

#### THE LORD'S SALVATION

THUS SAYS THE LORD: In an acceptable time I have answered you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. I will preserve you and give you for a covenant of the people, to raise up the land, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners: "Go forth." To them that are in darkness: "Show yourselves." They shall feed in the ways and in all high hills [10] shall be their pasture.

They shall not hunger or thirst, neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them; for He that has compassion on them will lead them, even by the springs of water will He guide them. I will make all My mountains a way, and My highways shall be raised on high. Behold, these shall come from far.

Behold, I make you a new threshing-sledge with sharp teeth. You shall thresh the mountains and beat them small and shall make the hills as chaff. You shall fan them and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in the Lord, you shall glory in the Holy One of Israel.

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🕍 [9] HUMBLE IN SPIRIT: Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Hisda disputed the meaning of the verse. One said that the Lord raises the humble man to His level before the Lord is with him. The other maintained that God descends to the level of the most humble.

Not only does the Lord not reject the poor, the despairing, the broken in spirit, but He declares that He is always near them. As the Psalms (34:18) say: "The Lord is near the broken-hearted and He helps the crushed in spirit." Rabbi Alexander said that the ordinary man throws out chipped or broken utensils, but the Lord cherishes those of his vessels who are hurt or damaged.

🕍 [10] IN ALL HIGH HILLS: Out of Zion the beauty of the world has been and shall yet be made perfect.

כֹּה אָמַר יְיָ: בְּעֵת רָצוֹן עֲנִיתִיךָ וּבְיוֹם יְשׁוּעָה עֲזַרְתִּיךָ.



## 5. ISAIAH [42-66]

### JACOB THE SUFFERING SERVANT

BEHOLD, [Jacob is] My servant [1] whom I uphold, My chosen one, in whom I delight. I have put My spirit upon him, he shall make justice go forth to the nations. He shall not shout nor raise his voice. He shall not make his voice heard in the streets. A bruised reed he shall not break and a dimly flickering wick he

shall not quench. He will establish justice according to the truth. He shall not be quenched nor crushed until he shall establish justice on earth; and the faraway islands will wait longingly for his teaching.

Listen to me, O islands, hearken people from afar: the Lord called me from my birth, before I was born He appointed my destiny. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, the shadow of His hand

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[1] JACOB IS MY SERVANT: *Jacob may be understood variously to mean the prophet, the faithful remnant of Israel, and an idealized people of Israel.*

לֹא יִצְעַק וְלֹא יִשָּׂא וְלֹא יִשְׁמִיעַ בַּחוּץ קוֹלוֹ.

protected me. He has made me a polished arrow in His quiver. He has concealed me. He said to me: “You are My servant, Israel, through whom I will be glorified.” [2] And I thought: “In vain I have labored, I have spent my strength for nothing and uselessly. But in truth my reward is with the Lord and my recompense with my God. Now the Lord that made me His servant even before I was born, to bring Jacob back to Him, and that Israel shall be gathered to Him,

for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has become My strength. Then He said: “It is too slight a thing for you that you should be My servant and merely raise the tribes of Israel and restore the survivors of Israel. I will also make you a light to the nations [3] that My salvation may reach the end of the earth.” Thus said the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him who is despised by men, [4] abhorred by nations, the slave of rulers. Kings shall rise

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🔮 [2] I WILL BE GLORIFIED: *The prophet as servant of God and personification of Israel was predestined to carry out the Lord's mission, was given sharp words by the Lord to do so, and was protected by Him.*

🔮 [3] A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS: *The suffering servant (and Israel) will be an example and a symbol to all the nations.*

🔮 [4] WHO IS DESPISED BY MEN: Akilos, the son of the Roman Emperor Hadrian's sister, wished to become a Jew. So he went to his uncle and told him that he wanted to go into business. Hadrian said: “I like your ambition. If you need money, my treasury is open to you.” Akilos replied: “I need no money, but I need advice. What kind of merchandise shall I buy to make a profit?” The Emperor answered: “Merchandise which has fallen so low in price it seems to be buried. Don't hesitate; buy it. Eventually it will rise beyond the original price.”

Akilos went to the land of Israel and was there converted to Judaism. He studied Torah diligently and became a great scholar. When he

וַיֹּאמֶר לִי: עַבְדִּי אֲתָהּ, יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּךְ אֶתְפָּאֵר.

when they see you, princes shall prostrate themselves before you, because the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, has chosen you.

#### HOPES AND TRIUMPHS

THE LORD endowed me with fluent speech that I should know how to comfort

returned to Rome his uncle asked, "Why is your face so changed? Have you lost your money or has someone insulted you? If you have lost your money, do not be concerned; I shall give you more, as much as you need. And if anyone has affronted you, tell me and I shall punish him."

"I have neither been insulted nor have I lost money," Akilos said.

"Then why has your appearance changed so much?" the Emperor inquired.

"Because I studied Torah diligently and was circumcised."

"Who gave you permission to do that?" the Emperor Hadrian asked.

"I took your advice, Uncle. You told me to buy merchandise which had declined so far in price it seemed to be buried. No nation is more despised than the Jews, but their greatness will not only be restored, but will rise far higher than it was before."

"Truly, is that why you did it?"

"I wanted to study Torah," Akilos confessed.

"But why did you have to circumcise yourself and become a Jew to do that?"

"Because," Akilos replied, "only in that way can you understand the Torah."

*Akilos understood that only by putting himself genuinely and irreversibly into the position of Jews, i.e., by being circumcised, could he truly know what it was to be a Jew and walk in the way of the covenant.*

לְמַעַן יִי אֲשֶׁר נֶאֱמַן, קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְבַחֲרֵנִי.

with words those who are weary. The Lord God opened my ear [to hear His message]. I did not rebel, nor turn away [from the heavy burden]. I gave my back to the lasher [5] and my cheek to those who plucked off the hair. I did not hide my face from those who shamed me

or spat on me. I have not been confounded, [6] for the Lord will help me. Therefore I have set my face like a flint and I know that I shall not be ashamed. My vindicator is near. Who will contend with me? Who is my adversary? Let him come near me. Behold, the Lord

❧ [5] MY BACK TO THE LASHER: Our Rabbis declare that this phrase does not mean that man has license to do what he wishes with his own body or property if he wishes to abuse himself or destroy his property wantonly. The verse means that the prophet knew that when he went to reprove the people he would be scorned and abused, but he was prepared for it. A man who stands up for justice and righteousness must be ready to suffer contumely and danger. But anyone who abuses his body or wantonly destroys his property is brought to account. As it is written (Genesis 9:5): "For your own life's blood, I shall require an account," and (Deuteronomy 4:5): "Guard yourself well."

*The prophet (and Israel) as suffering servant of the Lord willingly endures the pain and humiliation imposed by the Lord's mission.*

❧ [6] I HAVE NOT BEEN CONFOUNDED: Rabbi Bahay said: "Whoever trusts and relies on God is not confounded. He sets his face like flint and is not afraid of those who oppose him." The man who trusts in God is peaceful and tranquil, self-assured and self-reliant. He knows on whom he can rely.

If a man does not trust in the Lord he usually relies on idols made by the hands of men, or makes of man himself an idol. "Cursed is the man whose heart is departed from the Lord and puts his trust in man and makes flesh his strength."

עַל-כֵּן שִׁמַּתִּי פָנַי כַּחֲלָמִישׁ וְאַדַּע כִּי לֹא אֲבוֹשׁ.



God helps me. [7] Who shall prove me wrong? They are all like worn-out garments which fall apart because moths have eaten them up.

Behold, My servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high. As many were appalled at you because his face was so marred that it was unlike that of a man, [8] his form unlike that of the sons of Adam, so shall he startle many nations, their kings shall shut their mouths because of him. They shall see more than what was told to them and discern more than has been heard.

Who could have believed what we heard? [We saw that] he grew like a sapling before us and as a root out of dry ground. He had no form nor comeliness that we should notice him. He had no beauty that we should admire him. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of pains and intimate with disease, as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised and we took no heed of him.

#### THE SMITTEN OF GOD

YET OUR SICKNESS did he bear, our pains

☞ [7] THE LORD GOD HELPS ME: Our Sages tell us that communal worship and group study strengthen and exalt a man much more than if he prayed or studied alone. To what can we compare communal prayer and group study? To ten people who make a party. Each brings a different delicacy for the celebration: one brings fish, another meat, a third vegetables, a fourth fruit and desserts. When the ten dined together, each ate not only the delicacy he had himself brought but the delicacies of all the other nine. The same results from communal prayer and group study; each individual returns home with ten different thoughts and feelings about what has been studied or prayed.

☞ [8] UNLIKE THAT OF A MAN: *The suffering servant's (and Israel's) mission shall be a martyrdom whose agonies will scar him for life, making him different from all men. Yet, at the last, he shall overcome his pains and be exalted.*

הִנֵּה יִשְׁכֵּיל עַבְדִּי, יָרוּם וְנִשְׂא וְנִגְבָּה מְאֹד.

he carried. [9] We thought him smitten of God [10] but he was pierced and mortally wounded because we had sinned. Our iniquities crushed him. He was chastised for our transgressions and by his bruises were we healed. Like sheep we have all gone astray, every one turned his own way, and on him the Lord laid the guilt of all of us.

When he was oppressed, he was submissive and opened not his mouth. Like a lamb is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that is dumb before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. [11] For lack

of justice he was oppressed. He was cut off from the living because of the punishment due to My people for their transgressions. They dug his grave with the wicked, his tomb with the evildoers. Although he had done no violence, neither was deceit in his mouth, their iniquities he did bear.

Therefore will I give him a portion among the great and with the mighty shall he share the honor, for he bared his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for transgressors.

☞ [9] OUR PAINS HE CARRIED: *The suffering servant (and Israel) is punished for sins which he did not commit; the victim suffers for those who victimized, the innocent suffers for those who transgressed.*

☞ [10] SMITTEN OF GOD: Why should one man bear the sin and sickness of his generation? Is not every individual responsible for himself? Is it not written (Jeremiah 31:30): "Every one shall die for his own iniquity"?

These verses refer to the people of Israel in the Diaspora over many centuries. Nations thought that Jews suffered because they were rejected by God and therefore they were "despised by men, abhorred by nations and the slaves of rulers." In truth, they suffered because none cared, because "everyone turned his own way." The Jew did not conform. He cared about the guilt of his generation, suffered and was humiliated because of it. For lack of justice, "our iniquities crushed him."

☞ [11] HE DID NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH: *In the face of persecution and slaughter, the suffering servant (Israel) is gentle, meek and unprotesting.*

כִּשְׁהָ לְטֹבַח יוֹבֵל וְכָרְחַל לְפָנַי גּוֹזְזִיָּה נֶאֱלָמָה, וְלֹא יִפְתַּח פִּיו.

## BABYLON AND CHALDEA

COME DOWN and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no longer be called delicate and tender. Take the millstones and grind meal; remove your veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers. Your nakedness shall be uncovered, [12] yes, your shame shall be seen. I will take vengeance and will let no man intercede. Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, the Holy One of Israel.

Sit silent and get into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no longer be called the mistress of kingdoms. I was angry with My people, I profaned My inheritance, and gave them into your hand; you showed them no mercy. Upon the aged you have laid your heavy yoke.

And you have been secure in your wickedness. You have said: "No one sees me." [13] Your wisdom and your knowledge have perverted you. And you have said in your heart: "I am and there is none else beside me." Yet shall evil come upon you. You shall not know how to charm it away. And calamity shall fall upon you. You shall not be able to fend it off. And ruin shall come upon you suddenly before you know.

I have long time held My peace, I have been still and refrained Myself. Now will I cry like a woman in labor, gasping and panting at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs. I will make the rivers islands and will dry up the pools. I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, in paths that they knew not will I lead them. I will make darkness light before them and rugged places plain. These things will I do and I will not leave them

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☞ [12] YOUR NAKEDNESS SHALL BE UNCOVERED: *Babylonia, Chaldea, and all tyrannies shall finally be stripped of grandeur and pretense, their sins exposed and punished.*

☞ [13] NO ONE SEES ME: *One of the most common human delusions: If no one sees me sin, then no one knows, and nothing has happened. No sin has been committed and no wickedness need be repented.*

גּוֹאֲלֵנוּ יְיָ צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ, קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

undone. They shall be turned back, greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say unto molten images, "You are our gods."

#### THE FAST AND THE FUTURE

THE PEOPLE ASK: "Why have we fasted [14] and You took no heed of it? Why have we afflicted our souls and You took no knowledge of it?" It is because in the day of your fast you pursue your desire and oppress all who labor for you. You fast for the sake of strife and contention, and you strike with the fist of wickedness. Is such the fast I have chosen? The

day of a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush and spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast [15] and an acceptable day for the Lord? This is the fast I have chosen: To loosen the fetters of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free. You shall break every yoke, share your bread with the hungry and bring into your house the homeless. [16] When you see a naked man, you shall cover him and not hide yourself from your own flesh. [17] Then you shall call and the Lord will answer you. Then you shall cry and he will say: "Here I am."

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- ☞ [14] WHY HAVE WE FASTED: All the virtue of fasting lies in the giving of charity which accompanies it.
  - ☞ [15] WILL YOU CALL THIS A FAST: *Formal fasting is unacceptable to the Lord: It is not ceremonials the Lord desires but the substance of virtue, good deeds.*
  - ☞ [16] HOUSE THE HOMELESS: *True fasting is to perform the mitzvot of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, abolishing slavery and oppression.*
  - ☞ [17] NOT HIDE YOURSELF FROM YOUR OWN FLESH: Rabbi Jose the Galilean was married to a shrew. Students, colleagues and friends advised him to

הָלוֹא פָּרוּס לָרָעַב לַחֲמֶה וְעֲנִיִּים מְרוּדִים תָּבִיא בֵּית, כִּי תִרְאֶה עָרֹם וְכִסִּיתוֹ  
וּמִבְשָׂרָה לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם.

Thus said the Lord: "The heaven is  
My throne and the earth My footstool.  
What is the house that you may build

for Me? And what manner of place as  
My residence? My hand made all these  
things and so all these things came to be.

divorce her, but he could not, because her dowry was too great for him to repay. His friends pitied him so much that they raised the money for the dowry and so enabled Rabbi Jose to divorce her.

In time, the wife married a city watchman who abused her, beat her and took all her money. The wife might have brought the watchman to court, but since her former husband was one of the judges, she was ashamed to display her distress before him.

The watchman became blind and could not work, and his wife was obliged to go from house to house begging with him. In doing so she avoided the street on which her former husband lived. The watchman, though blind, knew the city by heart and asked her why she always avoided that particular street. She always made excuses until finally the blind man realized that she was avoiding Rabbi Jose's street.

The next day, when they went begging, he began to beat her with his cane and insist that she take him to that street. She did so, and while they went from house to house, he abused her and struck her with his cane. Rabbi Jose, hearing the tumult, looked out of the window and saw her distress. Immediately he called the court into session and set a monthly pension for her so that she would not have to beg any longer. When his friends asked him why he was so compassionate to someone who had tormented him for so many years, Rabbi Jose replied: "It is written: 'You shall not hide yourself from your own flesh.' And it is also written (Genesis 2:24) that when a man marries, he leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become as one flesh."

הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּסֵאִי וְהָאָרֶץ הֶדֶם רַגְלִי – אֵי-יָהּ בֵּית אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנוּ לִי וְאֵי-יָהּ מְקוֹם  
מְנוּחָתִי?

Yet on this man will I look, on the humble and the contrite spirit, [18] and on him who stands in awe at My word.”

Drop down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open that they may bring forth salvation, and let her cause righteousness to spring up together; I the Lord have created it.

And they that shall be of you shall build the old waste places. You shall raise up the foundations of many generations and you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.

Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord, and I will make you to ride upon

the high places of the earth and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

#### THE NEW JERUSALEM

REJOICE AND EXULT FOREVER in what I create; for, behold, I shall create a Jerusalem which will have in her only exultation and people of joy. I will rejoice with Jerusalem and joy in My people. The voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall not be an infant nor an old man who has not lived out his years of life. The youngest shall die a hundred years

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☞ [18] THE HUMBLE AND CONTRITE SPIRIT: Rabbi Okybia was sick and near to death. His son said to him: “Father, command your friends to befriend me. Tell them how good and able I am.” His father refused, replying, “I shall not say a word to them.” “Why, Father,” his son asked, “have I done something wrong?” Then Rabbi Okybia replied: “No, my son, but your deeds will bind them to you or estrange them from you.”

No one is given the delights of the world-to-come because of his father’s virtues.

Our Sages remind us that he who loves his neighbors, gives charity in the hour of their need, studies Torah and performs good deeds humbly, to him the Lord promised: “He shall call and I will answer.” Of that man too the Lord said: “I am with the contrite and humble spirit.”

וְגִלְתִּי בִירוּשָׁלַיִם וְשִׁשְׁתִּי בְּעַמִּי, וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע בָּהּ עוֹד קוֹל בְּכִי וְקוֹל זַעֲזָה.

old. He who will die short of a hundred years shall be deemed accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit, nor shall they plant and another eat. For as the days of a tree so shall be the days of My people, and My chosen ones shall enjoy the work of their hands.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. They shall not hurt nor destroy on My holy mountain, says the Lord.

For brass I will bring gold and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass and for stones iron. I will also make your officers peace, and righteousness your magistrates. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, desolation nor destruction within your borders. But you shall call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.

The sun shall no more go down, [19]  
neither shall your moon withdraw itself.  
For the Lord shall be your everlasting  
light and the days of your mourning  
shall be ended.

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ס [19] THE SUN SHALL NO MORE GO DOWN: Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish said: "In the time to come there will be no Gehenna. God will take the sun out of its orbit and its heat will heal the righteous and consume the wicked."

לֹא יָבוֹא עוֹד שֶׁמֶשׁ וְיָרֵחַ לֹא יֵאָסֶף, כִּי יִי יִהְיֶה לָּךְ לְאוֹר עוֹלָם וְשָׁלוֹם יָמֶי  
אֲבָלָךְ.



## 6. JEREMIAH [I-16] II KINGS [22, 23]

### THE PROPHET'S MISSION

THE WORDS OF JEREMIAH, [I] the son of Helkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. The word of the Lord came to him in the days of Josiah, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It also came in the days

of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, the king of Judah. It continued to come to him until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, when Jerusalem was carried into exile in the fifth month.

The word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Before you were born I sanctified you and appointed you a prophet to

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[I] JEREMIAH: *The name means "The Lord hurls," or "The Lord finds," or "the appointed of the Lord."*

וּבְטָרָם תֵּצֵא מִרְחֹם הַקֶּדְשִׁיתִי, נָבִיא לְגוֹיִם נִתְּתִיךָ.



the nations.” [2] Then I said: “Woe, Lord God, I cannot speak for I am so young.” The Lord said to me: “Do not say ‘I am so young’ [3] for I am sending you. Therefore, to whomsoever I shall send you, you shall go, and whatsoever I shall command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you.” Then the Lord stretched out

His hand and touched my mouth [4] and said to me: “Behold, I have put My word in your mouth. See, this day I have set you over the nations and the kingdoms to uproot and pull down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

The word of the Lord came also to me, saying: “You shall not take yourself

✎ [2] TO THE NATIONS: *Jeremiah is appointed a prophet not only to the people of Israel but to all the peoples of the world.*

✎ [3] I AM SO YOUNG: Our Sages say that Jeremiah complained: “O Lord, was there any prophet who came to Your people who was not jeered by them? They even wanted to kill the prophet of prophets, Moses. As it is written: ‘But all the congregation bade stone them with stones’ (Numbers 14:10). When Elijah came to them, they mocked him by calling him ‘the hairy one’ (II Kings 1:8). Elisha they nicknamed ‘baldhead’ (II Kings 2:23). The prophet Amos, who hesitated in his speech, they derided as ‘the stammerer.’ And I am so young, O Lord, without experience, and not wise in the ways of the world. Lay not so heavy a burden upon me.”

Then the Lord replied: “Because you are young have I chosen you. In your youthful innocence and naiveté you will dare and be bold in action. I love youth. As it is written: ‘When Israel was young, then I loved him’ (Hosea 11:1). Because you are young I have chosen you for this difficult task.”

✎ [4] TOUCHED MY MOUTH: *Henceforth Jeremiah will speak with a tongue imbued with the poetry of God’s words and intentions.*

רָאֵה, הַפְקֵד־תִּיךָ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל הַגּוֹיִם וְעַל הַמַּמְלָכוֹת לְנִתּוֹשׁ וְלְנִתּוּץ וְלְהַאֲבִיד  
וְלְהַרְוֹס, לְבָנוֹת וְלִנְטוֹעַ.

a wife, [5] neither shall you have sons or daughters in this place.” For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bore them, and concerning their fathers that begot them in this land: They shall die grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; they shall be as dung upon the face of the ground; and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament, neither bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people, says the Lord, even mercy and compassion. Both the great and the small shall die in this land; they shall not

be buried; neither shall men lament for them; neither shall men break bread for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother. And you shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and to drink.

#### THE ALMOND TWIG

THEN THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” And I said: “I see the twig of an almond tree.” And the Lord said to me: “You have seen well, for I am wakeful [6] upon My word and hasten to perform it.”

And the word of the Lord came to me again: “What do you see?” I said: “I see a seething cauldron and the seething began

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☞ [5] YOU SHALL NOT TAKE YOURSELF A WIFE: *For those who wish to change society, for those who wish to be moral exemplars, saints and prophets, having a wife and family, friends and acquaintances, can be a great burden and make more difficult the sacrifices a prophet must make.*

☞ [6] I AM WAKEFUL: *The Hebrew here is a pun. Shoked means alert, watchful, quick, or hasten; while shaken means almond tree. The almond tree in Israel is the first to blossom after winter is past. It awakens from the winter earlier than any other tree. So too will the Lord be quick to perform, hasten to carry out his word. The Lord promises that when there is the first blossom of moral*

הַיִּטְבָּת לְרֵאוֹת, כִּי שׁוֹקֵד אֲנִי עַל דְּבָרִי לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

from the north.” The Lord said: “Out of the north calamity shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. I will call all the families of all the kingdoms of the north and they shall come and each shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem and against the walls all around and against all the cities of Judah. I will pronounce My judgment against them for all their wickedness; because they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods and worshiped the works of their hands. Therefore, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, for I made you a

fortified city, an iron pillar, a brazen wall against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes, against the priests and against the people of the land. They shall fight against you, but they shall not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you.”

#### ISRAEL ASSAYED

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: “Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, [7] saying: ‘Thus said the Lord: I remember the affections of your youth, the love of your bridal days, how you followed me in the wilderness in a land

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*and spiritual rebirth, He will recognize it and hasten to fulfill His promises to the people of Israel.*

🕊 [7] IN THE EARS OF JERUSALEM: Why do the prophets so often appeal to men’s ears? “Go cry in the ears of Jerusalem.” “Hear you the word of the Lord.” Isaiah says: “Incline your ears and come to me. Hear and your soul shall live” (Isaiah 55:3). How can man, by hearing, make his soul live?

Our Rabbis explain that when the human being is soiled by sin, the ear hears the castigation, the man becomes aware of his sin and repents, and then the whole body acquires a new life. The best way to communicate is by speech; if the ear will hear, the whole body will live.

*It is through speech that men communicate the sense of sin and virtue, acceptance and repentance. It is speech, the voice and the ear, that differentiates men from other animals.*

זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ, אֶהְבֵּת כְּלוּלוֹתֶיךָ, לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרֵי בְמִדָּבָר, בְּאַרְץ לֹא יְרוּשָׁה.

unsown. Israel was the Lord's sacred portion, [8] the first-fruits of the harvest. Whoever devours him is guilty, and evil shall come upon him.'"

Now, thus said the Lord: "What did your fathers find wrong with Me that they have removed themselves so far from Me? They have followed nought and become nought. They asked not: 'Where is the Lord that brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death,

through a land that no man passed through and where no man dwelt.'

"I brought you to a land of fertile fields, to eat its fruits and good things. But you came and defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination. Therefore will I contend against you, against your children's children will I contend. My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves broken cisterns that cannot hold water. Your own wickedness [9] will punish you and your own unruliness

❧ [8] THE LORD'S SACRED PORTION: Why, on one hand, does Jeremiah castigate Judah, prophesying calamity, and on the other declare that "Israel is the Lord's sacred portion... Whoever devours him is guilty and evil shall come upon him"? The Rabbis explain with a parable: A king once married a woman whom he continually praised. When friends visited her, they saw her unkempt and her living quarters in disorder, so they said: "Even now when you are so slovenly, in such disarray, even sordid, your husband still adores and praises you before everyone. Think how much more he would love and admire and praise you if you were neat and clean and orderly."

So it was with Jeremiah's generation. The prophet told the people that the Lord still remembered the affection of their youth, of their bridal days, saying: "If you heard and obeyed me, then the Lord's bounty to you would be limitless because of His great love for you."

❧ [9] YOUR OWN WICKEDNESS: Rabbi Eliezer said: "The righteous are judged by their good inclination (*yetzer tov*), the wicked by their evil

קִדְּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לִי, רֵאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתָהּ, כָּל אוֹכְלֵיו יֵאָשְׁמוּ.

reprove you. You will know and see how evil and bitter a thing it is that you have forsaken the Lord, [10] your God. Upon the hem of your garments is the

blood of the souls of the innocent. Yet you say I am innocent, His anger has turned away from me. I will judge you for saying: 'I have not sinned.' [11]

inclination (*yetzer hara*).” In man the evil impulse will judge the man himself. Rabbenu Bachya explains that when a man seeks only pleasure he cannot really enjoy it, because pleasure becomes its own law which he is forced to obey and so pleasure itself becomes a burden to him. In that way his own sins come, in time, to punish him. The Gaon of Vilna comments further: “The man who devotes himself to worldly pleasure alone is like one who drinks salt water to quench his thirst; the more he drinks, the thirstier he becomes.”

❧ [10] FORSAKEN THE LORD: A prince always accompanied his father the king everywhere, and was respected and honored by the people. One day the prince abandoned his father and went out into the world. There he was insulted and abused by the people who did not know he was a prince. When he returned to the palace, he complained to his father that the people had shown him neither respect nor honor. The king then told him: “By abandoning me, you were no longer known as a prince. You behaved like a common man and therefore you were treated no better.”

So it is with Israel. When Israel walks in the way of the Lord, the nations of the world consider it chosen and are in awe of it. When Israel transgresses and abandons its King, then nations lose their respect and their awe of Israel.

❧ [11] I HAVE NOT SINNED: Rabbi Shmuel, son of Rav, said: “The Lord punishes man for sin only when man insists that he committed no sin.” But Rabbi Chanina objected: “Whoever says the Lord is indulgent and does not punish sinners is a fool. The Lord is gracious and long-

הִנְנִי נִשְׁפָּט אוֹתָךְ עַל אֲמִרְךָ לֹא חָטָאתִי.

"I made you an assayer among My people. You shall assay and you shall find out their ways. All of them are hardened rebels, going about with slanders. They are brass and iron. All of them are corrupted. The bellows blows fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire. But in vain does the founder refine, for the dross is not separated." Rejected silver they call them, because the Lord has rejected them.

#### EVIL FROM THE NORTH

"TELL IT IN JUDAH and let it be known in Jerusalem, and say: Blow the *shofar* through the land, cry aloud and say: Gather and let us go into the fortified cities. Raise up a standard toward Zion; assemble in a safe place; do not tarry; for I will bring evil from the north, a great destruction. A lion has come up from his thicket and a destroyer of nations has set out, gone forth from his place to make your land a desolation, so that your cities be laid waste, left without inhabitants. For this, gird on a sackcloth, lament and wail, for the fierce

anger of the Lord has not turned away from us.

"See, he comes up like a cloud and his chariots are as the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us for we are devastated. O Jerusalem, wash wickedness from your heart that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? For hear, a voice calls out from Dan and a calamity is proclaimed from the hills of Ephraim. Make it known to the nations, announce it to Jerusalem: Besiegers are coming from a distant land and their voices are raised against the cities of Judah. Like keepers of a field they ring her about. Your way, and your doings brought these things upon you. This is the fruit of your wickedness. It is bitter and it pierces your heart."

Thus said the Lord: "Behold, a people comes from the north, a mighty nation shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth. They are armed with bow and spear. They are cruel and have no compassion. Their voice is the roaring of the sea. They ride upon horses arrayed as men for war against you, O daughter

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suffering, he waits patiently for sinners to repent, but eventually he punishes those who do not."

בַּחֹן נִתְתִּיךְ בְּעַמִּי, מִבָּצָר. וְתִדַּע וּבְחִנָּת אֶת דִּרְכָּם.

of Zion." When we only heard of them, our hands waxed feeble; anguish took hold of us and pain as a woman in travail. "Go not in the field nor walk in the road, for there is the sword of the enemy and terror on every side. O daughter of My people, gird on sackcloth, wallow in ashes, and mourn as for an only son, most bitter lamentation, for the spoiler shall come suddenly upon us."

#### THE ANGUISHED OUTCRY

MY INNARDS! My innards! O the walls of my heart! My heart moans within me. I cannot keep silent because I heard the sound of the *shofar*, the alarm of war. Calamity follows calamity, the whole country is despoiled. Suddenly my tents are utterly destroyed. [12] In an instant the curtains of my tent are ruined. How long shall I see my standard, shall I hear the sound of the *shofar*? It is because My people are foolish; they know Me not. They

are stupid children and have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but ignorant to do good.

I looked at the earth and it was waste and void; and the heavens had no light. I looked at the mountains, and they trembled and all the hills swayed. I looked and there was no man and all the birds of heaven had fled. I looked and the fruitful field was a wilderness and all the cities were rubble because of His fierce anger. But, thus said the Lord: "The whole land shall be desolated, yet will I not make a full end."

I try to overcome my sorrow, but my heart aches within me. Behold the cry of the daughter of my people from a far off land: "Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King in her?"—"Why have they angered Me with their graven images and with foreign vanities?"—"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

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🕊 [12] MY TENTS ARE UTTERLY DESTROYED: Rabbi Elijah remarks that as tents collapse when the pegs are removed, so by having its scholars murdered the tent of Israel was destroyed. None remained to teach the people the Law what was permitted and forbidden, so Israel ceased to be a holy community.

*The cornerstone of a society is its laws and ethical precepts; without them the entire edifice of the society collapses.*

מַעֲזֵי מַעֲזֵי אוֹתִיָּלָה, קִירוֹת לְבִי הוֹמָה לִּי לְבִי, לֹא אֶחָרִישׁ.

## NO BALM IN GILEAD

The calamity which overtook my  
people broke my heart;  
Gloom and desolation have envel-  
oped me.

Is there no balm in Gilead?

Is there no physician there?

Why is there no recovery for  
my people?

I would that my head turned into  
water,

And my eyes into a fountain of tears  
That I might weep day and night  
for the slain of my people.

Woe is me for my hurt!

How grievous is my wound!

I thought this but a sickness

Which I could bear,

But my tent is cut down

And all its cords are broken;

My children are gone from me,

And they are no more;

There is none to pitch my tent  
again,

And to spread my tent flaps,

For the shepherds are become brut-  
ish,

And have not inquired of the Lord.

O Lord, I know that a man's way is  
not his own;

It is not [always] in man's power to

direct his steps as he walks.

O Lord, punish me, but in judgment,  
Not in anger, lest Thou bring me to  
nothing.

Pour out Thy wrath upon the na-  
tions that know Thee not,  
And upon the families that invoke  
not Thy name;

For they have devoured Jacob,

They have consumed him,

And have made his habitation des-  
olate.

## JOSIAH AND THE SCROLL

JOSIAH WAS eight years old when he be-  
gan to reign, and he reigned thirty-one  
years in Jerusalem. He did right in the  
eyes of the Lord, and walked in the way  
of David.

In the eighteenth year of King Josiah,  
the king sent Shaphan, the scribe, to the  
House of the Lord saying: "Go to Hil-  
kiah, the High Priest, and see that he  
shall take money which the keepers of  
the doors have gathered from the people  
and deliver it into the hands of the work-  
ers who have supervision of the House  
of the Lord, that they may hire the car-  
penters, the builders, and the masons, to  
make repairs on the House."

Now when they brought out the mon-  
ey that had been taken to the House of

הַצָּרִי אֵין בְּגִלְעָד אִם רוֹפֵא אֵין שָׁם, כִּי מְדוּעַ לֹא עָלְתָה אֲרוּכַת בֵּית עַמִּי?



the Lord, Hilkiah, the priest, found a scroll of the Torah of the Lord given to Moses.

Then Hilkiah said to Shaphan, the scribe: "I have found the scroll of the Torah in the House of the Lord." Then Shaphan carried the scroll to the king, and said: "Hilkiah, the priest, has given me a scroll." Then Shaphan read it before the king.

And the king commanded Hilkiah, the priest, and Shaphan, the scribe: "Go inquire of the Lord for me and for all Judah concerning the words of this book that is found; for great is the anger of the Lord against us, because our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this scroll, to do all in it that is written concerning us."

So Hilkiah and Shaphan went to Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvah. And she said to them: "Thus says the Lord: Tell the man that sent you to me: Behold, I will bring evil upon this place because they have forsaken Me, and have sacrificed to other gods. My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and it shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the Lord, say to him: The Lord, God of Israel, says: Because your heart was tender and you did humble

yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and its people, that they should become an astonishment and a curse, and have rent your clothes and wept before Me, I have also heard you. Therefore, I will gather you to your fathers in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." And they brought back word to the king.

#### A COVENANT BEFORE THE LORD

THEN THE KING gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. The king went up to the House of the Lord, together with all the men of Judah, and all the priests and prophets, and all the people small and great, and he read in their hearing all the words of the scroll of the covenant which was found in the House of the Lord.

Then the king stood on a platform, and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and keep His commands, His decrees and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, and to confirm the words of the covenant that were written in this scroll. And all the people accepted the covenant, and did according to the covenant of the God of their fathers.

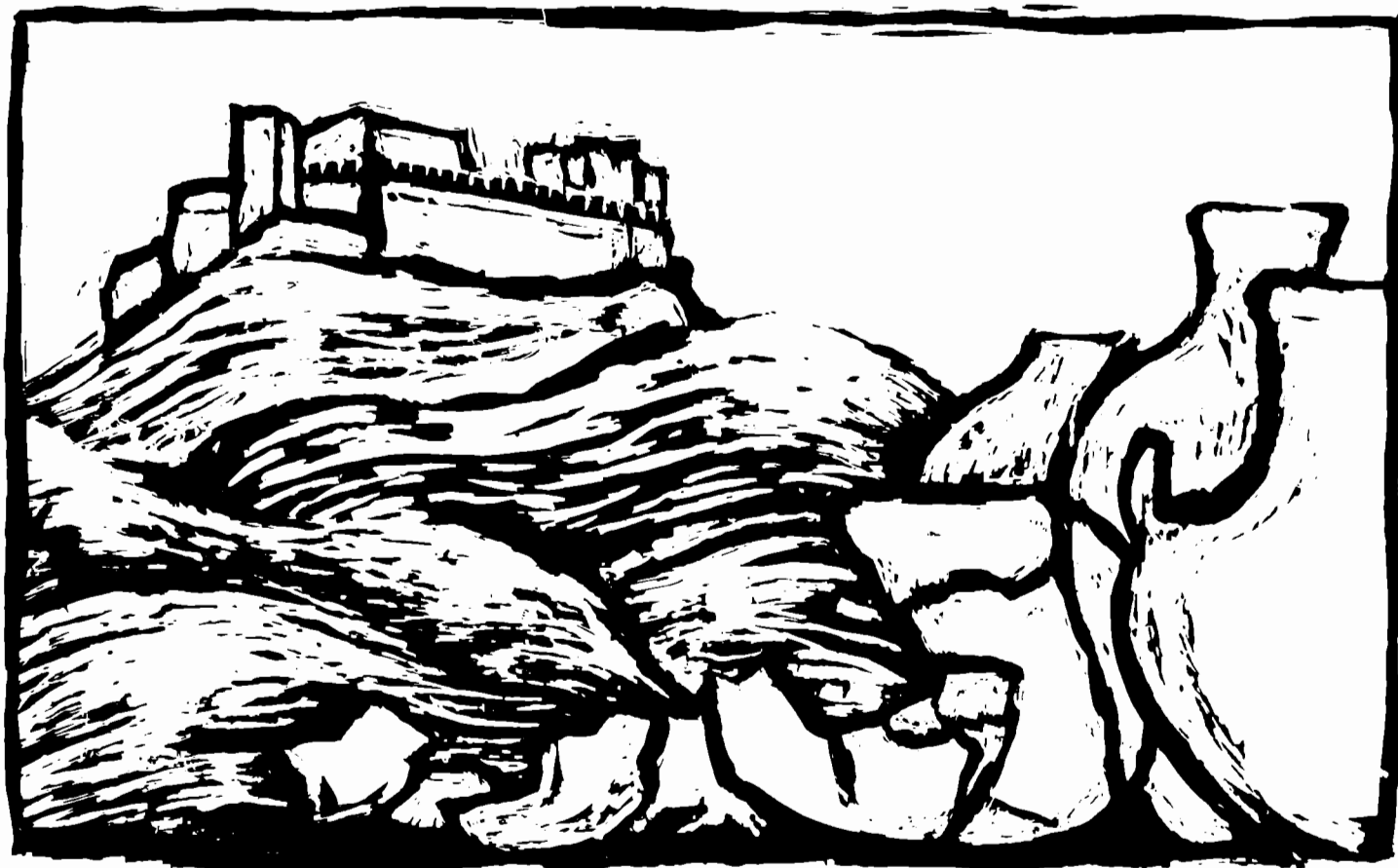
לְכֹוּ דַרְשׁוּ אֶת יְיָ בְּעַדִּי וּבְעַד הָעָם וּבְעַד כָּל יִהְיֹוּדָה עַל דְּבַרִּי הַסֵּפֶר הַנִּמְצָא  
הַזֶּה.

## JOSIAH'S REFORMS

THEN THE KING commanded the priests to bring out of the Temple of the Lord all the vessels which were made for the Baal and the Asherah, and he burned them outside Jerusalem, in the limekilns

at Kidron. He also did away with those idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to offer sacrifices to the Baal, to the sun, to the moon, and to all the host of heaven. He destroyed the Topheth which was in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, so that no man might make his son or daughter pass through the fire of Molech.

וְטָמֵא אֶת הַתִּפְתִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּגִי בֶן-הַנֶּזֶם, לְבַלְתִּי לְהַעֲבִיר אִישׁ אֶת בְּנוֹ וְאֶת בִּתּוֹ  
בָּאֵשׁ לַמֹּלֵךְ.



## 7. JEREMIAH

[5-26] II CHRONICLES [35, 36] LAMENTATIONS [4]

### JEREMIAH AND THE COVENANT

ALL JUDAH and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented after him: "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, of whom we said, 'Under His shadow shall we live among the nations,' was trapped in their pit. But weep not for him that is dead, neither bemoan him."

Then the people took Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place. Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to rule;

and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. Then [Necoh] the king of Egypt deposed him and fined the land a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. The king of Egypt made his brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Necoh took Jehoahaz, his brother, and carried him away to Egypt.

[And Jeremiah said:] "But weep bitterly for him that goes away, for he shall return no more. For thus said the Lord concerning Jehoahaz who went forth into exile: 'He shall not return here any more, but he shall die in the place to

רוח אֶפְיָנוּ, מְשִׁיחַ יְיָ, נִלְכַּד בְּשָׁחִיתוֹתָם, אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְנוּ בְּצִלּוֹ נַחֲיָה בְּגוֹיִם.

which they have taken him captive, and he shall see this land no more.’”

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign. He reigned eleven years in Jerusalem and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.

The Lord said to me: “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: ‘Hear the words of the covenant and do them.’” But they did not observe them.

The Lord said to me: “Treason is found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back [1] to the sins of their forefathers, who refused to hear My words; they have run after other gods

to serve them. They have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers. Therefore will I bring disaster upon them which they shall not be able to escape. Though they shall cry to Me, I shall not listen to them.

And you! Do not pray for this people, [2] neither lift up a cry [3] on their behalf, because I will not listen to them when they cry to Me in time of their distress.

#### JERUSALEM CORRUPTED

SEE YOU NOT what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood [4] and the fathers make the fire, and the women

☞ [1] THEY HAVE TURNED BACK: The greatest sinner is he who regrets his former goodness.

☞ [2] DO NOT PRAY FOR THIS PEOPLE: He who is compassionate when he should be severe ends by being severe when he should be compassionate.

☞ [3] NEITHER LIFT UP A CRY: Have you done good to the evil? Then you have done evil.

☞ [4] THE CHILDREN GATHER WOOD: *Everyone, men, women and children, take part in the rites of idolatry.*

וְאַתָּה אֵל תִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַד הָעָם הַזֶּה, וְאֵל תַּשָּׂא בְּעַד רִנָּה וּתְפִלָּה.

knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, [5] and to pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. Do they provoke Me? said the Lord. Do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? My anger and My fury [6] shall be poured out upon this place: upon man, upon beasts, upon the trees in the field and upon the fruit of the

land; and it shall burn without being quenched.

Wander through the streets of Jerusalem, look and see, search her squares; if you can find a man, [7] if there is one who does justice and seeks truth, then I will forgive her. Even when they swear, "As the Lord lives," they swear falsely. O Lord, are not Your eyes looking for truth? You have stricken them, [8] but

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🔪 [5] QUEEN OF HEAVEN: *Probably Ishtar, the goddess of Babylon, and also a reference to Babylonian astrology.*

🔪 [6] MY ANGER AND MY FURY: *God's moral indignation at Israel's sinfulness is so great that He will punish men, animals and land.*

🔪 [7] IF YOU CAN FIND A MAN: When the Lord saw that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah had grown so heinous that the cities would have to be destroyed, lest they corrupt the rest of the world, He told Abraham of His intention so that the Patriarch might plead for them. When the Lord saw the great iniquity of Jerusalem which He had to punish, He told Jeremiah to search out even a single just man, because He wanted Jeremiah to be able to plead the cause of Jerusalem.

🔪 [8] YOU HAVE STRICKEN THEM: Maimonides points out that the man who remains unaware of wrongdoing, and does not consider repentance, cannot see or understand the great order of law in nature and society. People's belief that their troubles are mere accidents impels them to continue in their evil ideas and wicked behavior.

שׁוּטְטוּ בְּחֻצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וּרְאוּ-נָא וּדְעוּ, וּבְקִשׁוּ בְּרַחוּבוֹתֶיהָ אִם תִּמְצְאוּ אִישׁ.

they were not affected. You almost destroyed them, but they did not heed the warning. They made their faces harder than rock, and have refused to repent.

I said: "They are poor people, [9] they are foolish, and they know not the ways of the Lord, nor the ordinances of their God. I will go to the great ones [10] and speak to them, for they know the ways of the Lord, and the ordinances of their God." But they too have broken the yoke and burst the bonds. [11] They

pry, as fowlers lie in wait; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit, therefore they became great and rich. They grew fat and sleek, they overstepped all bounds of wickedness. [12] They did not plead the cause of the fatherless and did not defend the rights of the needy. Shall I not punish them for these things, said the Lord; shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

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🔥 [9] THEY ARE POOR PEOPLE: *Jeremiah pleads that poverty and ignorance have made the people sin.*

🔥 [10] TO THE GREAT ONES: Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai said: "Happy is that generation whose leaders bring atonement for its unintended sins. If the leader does so, the common man will surely do likewise. And if they atone for their unintended sins, how much more readily will they repent for their deliberate transgressions."

🔥 [11] BURST THE BONDS: *The people have thrown off the restraints of religion and morality; the yoke of Torah is broken and the bonds of God's commandments.*

🔥 [12] BOUNDS OF WICKEDNESS: Rabbi Johanan ben Nuri said: "The art of the evil inclination (*yetzer hara*) is that today it says to man: Do this! and the next day, Do that! until at last it commands: Worship other gods! And then man obeys and does that."

כְּכִלּוֹב מְלֵא עוֹף כֵּן בְּתִיָּהֶם מְלֵאִים מְרָמָה.

## THE FIERCE ENEMY

THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL and the house of Judah committed treason against Me, says the Lord. They have denied the Lord and said: "It is not from Him that comes evil [or good], neither shall we see sword or famine. And the prophets are mere wind, no true word is in them. As they have spoken to us, so let it be done to them." Therefore, says the Lord, God of the host, because they have spoken this word, I will make My word in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it shall devour them.

O house of Israel, said the Lord, I shall bring upon you a nation from afar, a mighty nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, so you will not understand what they say. Their quiver is an open grave, they are all mighty warriors. They shall eat

up your harvest and your bread; they shall eat up your sons [13] and daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig-trees. They shall batter down your fortified cities in which you trust. But even in those days I shall not destroy you completely.

When men shall ask you, "Why is it that the Lord, our God, does all these things to us?" you shall say to them: "Thus said the Lord: As you have forsaken Me and served strange gods in your land, so shall you serve strangers in a land that is not yours."

## THE TEMPLE SHALL BE DESTROYED

THE WORD that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word: Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah, who enter this gate

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☞ [13] THEY SHALL EAT UP YOUR SONS: Our Sages ask what the relationship is between eating up the harvest and bread, and eating up sons and daughters. Rabbi Jonathan explains: "If a man deprives another man of his property, he is in a sense depriving him of his life."

*In taking another man's food, clothing, shelter and means of livelihood away, one may not only kill him, but kill his children as well.*

הַנְּנִי נֹתֵן דְּבָרִי בְּפִיךָ לְאֵשׁ וְהָעָם הַזֶּה עֵצִים וְאֶכְלָתָם.

to worship the Lord. Thus said the Lord of the host, the God of Israel:

Amend your ways and your doings and I will let you dwell in this land. Trust not in such lying words as: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." [14] These are deceptive words. If you will thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you see justice done between a man and his neighbor, if you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, and shed no innocent blood in this land, and do not follow other gods to your own injury, [15] then will I let you dwell in this place, in the land I gave to your fathers, forever and ever. But you trust in lying words which are of no value.

Will you steal, murder, commit all kinds of sin, swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal, and follow after gods whom you know not? Then you come and stand before Me in this house which bears My name and say: "We are safe, safe to do all these abominations." Is this house which bears My name become a den of thieves in your eyes? Go now to My place which was in Shiloh, [16] where first I caused My name to dwell and see what I did to it, because of the wickedness of My people Israel. Now, because you did the same deeds, I spoke to you again, and you did not listen. I called, but you did not answer. Therefore, will I do to this house which bears My name, in which you trust, and to the land which

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☞ [14] THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD: *Unless the people mend their ways, cease to sin and begin to do justice, the presence of the Temple among them will not save them from destruction and disaster. They will be punished and driven from the land.*

☞ [15] TO YOUR OWN INJURY: *To follow false gods is to follow false values; to live by those false values is to do yourself irreparable injury.*

☞ [16] SHILOH: *Once before, when Israel transgressed, the Lord had destroyed His sanctuary at Shiloh. If Israel continues to make the Lord's house a den of thieves, He will not hesitate to destroy the Temple.*

הַיְטִיבוּ דַרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְאַשְׁכְּנָה אֶתְכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה.



I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. [17] I will cast you out of My sight as I have cast out your brethren, the children of Ephraim.

#### FALSE PROPHETS

BOTH PROPHET AND PRIEST [18] are ungodly. Yes, in My house, have I found their wickedness, says the Lord. And I have seen unseemliness in the prophets of Samaria: They prophesied by Baal and caused My people Israel to err. But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: They commit adultery and walk in lies and they strengthen the hands of evil-doers, so that none returns from his wickedness. From the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness is gone forth into all the land.

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they have stood in My council, then let them cause My people to hear My words, and turn them from their evil ways and from the evil of their doings.

#### GOOD DEEDS NOT SACRIFICES

HEAR, O EARTH, I will bring a calamity upon this people, the fruit of their own scheming, [19] because they have not given heed to My words and have rejected My teaching. Of what value to Me is the frankincense that comes from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? I do not desire your burnt-offerings, [20] and your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me.

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☞ [17] AS I HAVE DONE TO SHILOH: From the day the Temple was destroyed, God knows no laughter.

☞ [18] BOTH PROPHET AND PRIEST: *False prophets and corrupt priests have led the people astray and have themselves set evil examples.*

☞ [19] THE FRUIT OF THEIR OWN SCHEMING: *Calamity will come to Israel as the result of its own sins, its failure to walk in the ways of the Lord and His Torah.*

☞ [20] YOUR BURNT-OFFERINGS: He who practices charity is more virtuous than all the sacrifices.

לֹא שְׁלַחְתִּי אֶת הַנְּבִיאִים וְהֵם רָצוּ, לֹא דִבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵיהֶם וְהֵם נִבְאוּ.

For on the day I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them, nor commanded them, about burnt-offerings or sacrifices. But this I commanded them, saying: "Listen to My voice and I will be Your God and you shall be My people. You walk in all the ways I command you that it may be well with you."

For the children of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight, said the Lord; they have set their detestable things in the house whereon My name is called, to defile it. And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn

their sons [21] and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, neither came it into My mind. Therefore, behold, the days come when it shall be no longer called Topheth, but the valley of slaughter; for they shall bury in Topheth for lack of room. And the carcasses of this people shall be food for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall frighten them away. Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; and and the land shall be desolate.

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🔪 [21] TO BURN THEIR SONS: The citizens of Jerusalem taunted Jeremiah by saying: "Did not the Lord command the Patriarch Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac as a burnt-offering? (Genesis 22:2) Did not Jephthah vow to give as a burnt-offering the first thing that came out of his house to greet him, and then sacrifice his only daughter to the Lord? (Judges 11:31, 39) Did not Mesha, king of Moab, sacrifice his eldest son for a burnt-offering on the walls of his city?" (II Kings 3:27).

To which the prophet replied: "The Lord never commanded Jephthah to sacrifice his daughter. He never spoke to the pagan king of Moab. Nor did it come to His mind that Abraham should sacrifice Isaac. The Lord wished only to test Abraham."

*The Lord tested Abraham and Isaac in the akedah specifically to warn Israel against child sacrifice and to prohibit it. Child sacrifice was one of the "ways of the nations" against which the prophets warned most vehemently.*

שְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי לְעָם.

## THE EARTHEN FLASK

THUS SAID THE LORD to Jeremiah: "Go and buy a potter's earthen flask and take with you the elders of the people and the elders of the priests. Then go out to the valley of Ben-Hinnom and you shall say: Hear the words of the Lord, [22] O king of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will bring disaster on this place that whoever hears it, his ears shall ring, because you have forsaken Me and have desecrated this place and offered sacrifices to other gods and filled this place with the blood of the innocent.

"Then you [Jeremiah] shall break the flask in the sight of the men that went with you, and you shall say to them: 'Thus said the Lord of the host: As one breaks an earthen vessel that cannot be made whole again, so will I break this people and this city.'"

When Jeremiah came from Topheth where the Lord had sent him, he stood in the court of the Lord's house and said to all the people: "Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: I will bring upon this city and all the towns [around it] the great

calamity that I have pronounced against them because the people have made their necks stiff that they might not listen to My words."

Now when Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was the chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet and put him into the stocks. Then Jeremiah said: "Thus said the Lord: I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and you shall see them fall. I will also give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon or shall slay them. And you, Pashhur, and all your household, shall go into exile. You shall be brought to Babylon and there you shall die and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied falsely."

## THE TRIAL

IN THE BEGINNING of the reign of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah came the word of the Lord [to Jere-

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🔥 [22] HEAR THE WORDS OF THE LORD: God does not punish unless He first gives warning.

כָּכָה אֶשְׁבֵּר אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה וְאֶת הָעִיר הַזֹּאת, כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבֵּר אֶת כָּלִי הַיּוֹצֵר אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא יוּכַל לְהִרְפֶּה עוֹד.

miah], saying: “[Now] stand in the court of the Lord’s house and speak to all the people of Judah who come to worship in the house of the Lord, all that I commanded you to speak to them, do not keep back a single word.”

When Jeremiah had finished speaking all the Lord had commanded him to speak, the priests and the [false] prophets laid hold of him and said: “You shall surely die. How dare you prophesy in the name of the Lord that his house shall become like Shiloh and this city desolate, without an inhabitant?”

When the princes of Judah heard this, they came up from the king’s house to the house of the Lord and sat in the entrance of the new gate of the Lord’s house. Then the priests and the [false] prophets spoke to the princes and to all the people, saying: “This man deserves death, for he has prophesied against this city, as the people have heard with their own ears.”

Then Jeremiah said to all the princes and to all the people: “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city, all the words that you have heard. Therefore, now, amend your

ways and your doings, and heed the voice of the Lord, your God; then the Lord will repent [23] of the evil which He has pronounced against you. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is right and proper. Only you should know that, if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourself and upon the city, for in truth the Lord has sent me to speak all the words in your ears.”

#### DEFENSE AND PROSECUTION

THEN SOME OF THE ELDERS of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly, saying: “Micah, the Morashtite, prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and he [also] said: ‘Zion shall be plowed like a field and Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountains of the house of the Lord a high place in the forest.’ Did Hezekiah, king of Judah, put him to death? He feared the Lord and entreated Him, and the Lord repented of the evil which He pronounced against them. This man does not deserve death because he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.”

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☞ [23] THE LORD WILL REPENT: Even in His anger the Lord remembers to send a share of His mercies.

אֵין לְאִישׁ הַזֶּה מִשְׁפָּט מִן כִּי בְשֵׁם יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ דִּבֶּר אֱלֵינוּ.

[But the other elders said:] “There was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord. Uriah, the son of Shemaiah, also prophesied against this city and against this land, just as Jeremiah has prophesied. Then Jehoiakim, the king, and all his valiant men, and all the princes heard it, and the king sought to put him to death. Uriah heard of it and

fled to Egypt. But Jehoiakim, the king, sent men to Egypt and they fetched Uriah from Egypt and brought him before King Jehoiakim who had him slain with the sword and cast his dead body in a grave in the public burying ground.”

But Ahikam, [24] the son of Shaphan, protected Jeremiah and saved him from those who wanted to put him to death.



[24] AHİKAM: *Ahikam was one of the men Josiah sent with the scroll to consult the prophetess Huldah when it was discovered in the wall of the Temple. Ahikam protected Jeremiah, as did his son Gedaliah, later governor of Judah under Babylon.*

אָךְ יָד אַחִיקָם בֶּן שָׁפָן הִצִּיל אֶת יִרְמְיָהוּ לְבִלְתִּי תֵּת אוֹתוֹ בְּיַד הָעָם לְהַמִּיתוֹ.



## 8. JEREMIAH [11-36]

### A KING MUST BE RIGHTEOUS

THUS SAID THE LORD: "Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there these words, saying: 'Hear the word of the Lord, O King of Judah, who sits on the throne of David. You and

your servants and the people who enter this gate. Thus said the Lord: Do justice [1] and righteousness, deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, [2] the fatherless nor to the widow; neither shed innocent blood in this place. If you do these things, then

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[1] DO JUSTICE: When mercy is not a part of justice, the world is overcome by hunger.

[2] TO THE STRANGER: *In ancient times strangers were the subject of hostility and suspicion, and this still remains true in many parts of the world. The Bible was especially concerned to protect the rights and privileges of strangers.*

עֲשׂוּ מִשְׁפָּט וְצֶדֶק וְהַצִּילוּ גֵזוּל מִיַּד עֲשׂוּק.

shall there enter by the gate of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he and his servants and his people. But if you do not heed these words, I swear by Myself, [3] says the Lord, that this house shall become desolation.'

"Woe to him [4] who builds his house by unrighteousness and his chamber by injustice, that makes his neighbor work without wages [5] and give him not his hire, that says, 'I shall build me a spacious house with roomy chambers, wide windows, paneled with cedar and painted with vermilion.' Would you play the

king by vying with other kings in cedar? Your father ate and drank [6] and also did justice and righteousness. Then was it all well with him. He defended the poor and needy; it was well with him. Is this not to know me? [7] says the Lord. But your eyes and your heart are set on nothing but your covetousness, on shedding innocent blood, on oppression and on violence. Therefore said the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah: They shall not lament for him. He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

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☞ [3] SWEAR BY MYSELF: *This is the most awesome vow that may be sworn in Scripture. It is, in fact, a metaphor for God declaring His ethical nature and purpose.*

☞ [4] WOE TO HIM: *Censure of King Jehoiakim.*

☞ [5] WORK WITHOUT WAGES: *The prophets all condemned forced labor. Even the king was prohibited from requiring work without wages, though many of the kings violated the prohibition.*

☞ [6] ATE AND DRANK: *Josiah concentrated on the ethical duties of a king, not on the material comforts and luxuries of monarchy.*

☞ [7] IS THIS NOT TO KNOW ME: *The moral nucleus of Judaism: To do justice, to behave righteously, to protect the poor, is to know God.*

דָּן דִּין עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹן, אִזּוּ טוֹב. הֲלֹא הִיא הַדַּעַת אוֹתִי, נְאוּם יְיָ.

## THE BURNED SCROLL

IN THE FOURTH YEAR of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Take a scroll and write on it all the prophecies I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah and against all the nations, from the first I spoke to you in the days of Josiah to this day. Perhaps when Judah will hear all the calamities which I propose to bring upon them, they may return from their evil ways [8] and I will forgive them their iniquity and their sins."

So Jeremiah called Baruch, the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote upon a scroll from the mouth of Jeremiah all the prophecies which the Lord had spoken to him. Then Jeremiah said to Baruch: "I am forbidden from going into the house of the Lord. Therefore you go and read from the scroll the prophecies of the

Lord to the people in the Lord's house who gather there upon a fast-day." Baruch did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him.

When Micaiah had heard all the words that Baruch read, he told it all to the princes who were in the scribe's chamber. Then they sent Jehudi, the son of Nethaniah, to Baruch, saying: "Take the scroll from which you read to the people and come to us." So Baruch took the scroll in his hand and came to them, and read it to them.

When they had heard it, they turned in fear to one another, and they asked: "Tell us, how did you write all this?" [9] Baruch answered them: "He pronounced all these prophecies to me with his mouth and I wrote them with ink on the scroll." The princes said to Baruch: "Go and hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and let no man know where you are. And we will tell the king these prophecies."

❧ [8] FROM THEIR EVIL WAYS: He who justifies himself below is justified above.

*Those who live righteously and perform deeds of lovingkindness in this world will need no other justification in the world to come.*

❧ [9] HOW DID YOU WRITE ALL THIS: To discover if the scroll contained the words of God, the princes asked Baruch if he had transcribed Jeremiah's words exactly. Baruch told them that he had.

מִפִּי יִקְרָא אֵלַי אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, וְאֲנִי כוֹתֵב עַל הַסֵּפֶר בְּדִיּוֹ.



They deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe and they came to the king in the court and told him the whole matter. Then the king sent Jehudi to bring the scroll. Jehudi went and brought the scroll and read it before the king and all the princes.

Now the king was sitting in the winter-house because it was the ninth month of the year. [10] The fire of the brazier was burning before him. And when Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king would cut it off with a penknife and cast it into the fire [11] that was in the brazier until the whole scroll was consumed in the fire. Elnathan and De-

laiah and Gemariah entreated the king not to burn the scroll, but he would not listen to them. And the king commanded that Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet be taken, but the Lord hid them.

#### THE PLOT AGAINST JEREMIAH

I WAS LIKE A DOCILE LAMB that is led to the slaughter. I knew not [12] that they plotted against me: "Let us put poison that kills into his food and let us cut him off from the land of the living that his name may be no more remembered." The men of Anathoth [13] that sought my

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- ☞ [10] THE NINTH MONTH: *About the same time as our month of December. This month was subsequently called Kislev in the Jewish calendar.*
- ☞ [11] CAST IT INTO THE FIRE: When a great man says something which appears illogical, do not laugh at it. Instead, try to understand it.
- ☞ [12] I KNEW NOT: A man who intends to do evil to others does not generally reveal his intention, but God discloses it.
- ☞ [13] THE MEN OF ANATHOTH: Anathoth was a village of priests descended from Abiathar who had been expelled from the Temple by King Solomon. People considered the priests of Anathoth rejected, and only the poorest folk brought them their sacrifices. As a result they were so poor they often had to beg to live.

וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי עָלַי חָשְׁבוּ מַחְשָׁבוֹת: וַשְּׁחִיתָה עֵץ בְּלֶחֶמוֹ וַיִּכְרְתוּנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים.

life said: "You shall not prophesy [14] in the name of the Lord lest you die by our hands." But, Lord of hosts who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the innermost thoughts and feelings: Let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my cause.

Then they said: "Come let us hatch a plot against Jeremiah; for instruction shall not perish [15] from the priest nor

counsel from the wise nor prophecy from the prophet. Come, let us malign him [16] and let us pay no heed to his prophecies."

Give heed to me, O Lord, and listen to the voice of those that contend with me. Shall evil be repaid for good? They have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before You to speak good for them, [17] to turn away Your wrath

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*When Josiah destroyed all the high places in Judah, the one at Anathoth was among them. Jeremiah's support of Josiah's reform earned him the enmity of his neighbors, not only because their shrine was desecrated but because they were thereby deprived of their meager livelihood.*

☞ [14] YOU SHALL NOT PROPHECY: *Tyrannies always try to suppress free speech, by threat of death, by slander, by entrapment, by any devious or dubious means at hand which seems to them effective.*

☞ [15] FOR INSTRUCTION SHALL NOT PERISH: *The people thought they had no need of Jeremiah's prophecy, instruction or counsel; they considered themselves and their wise men sufficiently instructed and enlightened.*

☞ [16] LET US MALIGN HIM: *God accepts repentance for all sins, except that of abusing another with a bad name.*

[17] SPEAK GOOD FOR THEM: *The ideal man has the strength of a male and the compassion of a female.*

*Jeremiah had often, out of compassion, interceded for them with God.*

לְכוּ וְנִחַשְׁבָה עַל יְרֵמְיָהוּ מִחֲשָׁבוֹת, כִּי לֹא תֵאבֹד תּוֹרָה מִכֶּהֵן וְעֵצָה מִחֲכָם  
וְדָבָר מִנְּבִיא.

from them. You, Lord, know all their schemes against me to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity and do not blot out their sins from Your sight. Deal with them in the time of Your anger.

#### MAN OF CONTENTION

O Lord, You have enticed me and I  
was enticed, [18]  
You have overpowered me and  
have prevailed; [19]  
I have become the laughingstock  
all the day long,  
Everyone mocks me.  
As often as I speak, I cry out,  
I cry: 'Violence and spoil';

Because the word of the Lord is  
made  
A reproach and a derision all the day  
long.  
If I say: 'I will not make mention of  
His name,  
Nor speak any more in His name,'  
Then it is in my heart as if it were a  
burning fire  
Shut up in my bones.  
I weary myself to hold it in,  
But I cannot endure it. [20]  
For I have heard the whispering of  
many,  
Terror on every side: [21]  
'Denounce, [22] and we will de-  
nounce him';

☞ [18] I WAS ENTICED: If a man merits it, he will serve; if not, he will be lost.

☞ [19] AND HAVE PREVAILED: *Though Jeremiah was reluctant, the Lord prevailed on him to accept his prophetic mission.*

☞ [20] I CANNOT ENDURE IT: *The prophet would as soon leave the words of his prophecy unsaid, but they burn inside him until he must speak them out.*

☞ [21] TERROR ON EVERY SIDE: Better to be with those who are persecuted than with those who are the persecutors.

☞ [22] DENOUNCE: He who secretly informs against his fellowman has no share of the world to come.

וְאָמַרְתִּי: לֹא אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא אֶדְבֹּר עוֹד בְּשִׁמּוֹ – וְהָיָה בְּלִבִּי כְּאֵשׁ בּוֹעֶרֶת, עָצוּר  
בְּעִצְמוֹתַי.

Even of all my familiar friends,  
 Them that watch for my halt-  
 ing: [23]  
 'Perhaps he will be enticed [24] and  
 we shall prevail against him,  
 And we shall take our revenge on  
 him.'

#### PROPHET OF STRIFE

Cursed be the day wherein I was  
born;  
The day wherein my mother bore  
me,  
Let it not be blessed.  
 Why did He not let me die in the  
 womb,  
 So that my mother would have  
 been my grave?  
 Why did I come forth from the  
 womb  
 To see trouble and sorrow,  
 That my days should be consumed  
 in shame?

Woe is me, my mother, that you  
 bore me,  
 A man of strife and a man of con-  
 tention to the whole earth!  
 Right would You be, O Lord,  
 Were I to contend with You,  
 Yet will I reason with You:  
 Why does the way of the wicked  
 prosper?  
 Why are all those secure who deal  
 very treacherously?  
 You have planted them, yes, they  
 have taken root;  
 They grow, yes, they bring forth  
 fruit;  
 You are near in their mouth,  
 And far from their reins. [25]

#### THE LORD'S REPLY

Am I a God near at hand, says the  
 Lord,  
 And not a God afar off?  
 Can any hide himself in secret places

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🌀 [23] FOR MY HALTING: *Watching for Jeremiah to make a misstep.*

🌀 [24] HE WILL BE ENTICED: *Hoping that Jeremiah will be provoked into rash acts or intemperate outbursts, so they can be revenged on him.*

🌀 [25] FROM THEIR REINS: God created the evil impulse (*yetzer hara*), but also provided the Torah as its antidote.

אָרוּר הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יָלַדְתִּי בוֹ, יוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִלְדְּתִנִּי אִמִּי אֶל יְהִי בְרוּךְ.

That I shall not see him?  
 The heart is deceitful above all  
 things,  
 And it is exceeding weak—who  
 can know it?  
 I, the Lord, search the heart,  
 I try the reins,  
 Even to give every man according  
 to his ways,  
 According to the fruits of his doings.  
Blessed is the man that trusts in the  
Lord,  
 And whose trust the Lord is.  
 For he shall be as a tree planted by  
 the waters,  
 And that spreads out its roots by the  
 river,  
 And shall not see when heat comes,  
 But its foliage shall be luxuriant;  
 And shall not be anxious in the  
 years of drought,  
 Neither shall cease from yielding  
 fruit.

## THE HEART REJOICES

O Lord, remember me and think of  
 me,  
 And avenge me of my persecutors;  
 Know that for Your sake I have  
 suffered reproach.  
 I sat not in the company of them  
 that made merry and rejoiced;  
 I sat alone [26] because of Your  
 hand;  
 For You have filled me with in-  
 dignation.  
 Why is my pain perpetual,  
 And my wound incurable, so that  
 it refuses to be healed?  
 But when Your words were found,  
 I ate them; [27]  
 And Your words were to me a joy  
 and the rejoicing of my heart;  
 Because Your name was called upon  
 me, O Lord of hosts.

☞ [26] I SAT ALONE: *The prophet's spirit and mission set him apart from other people.*

☞ [27] I ATE THEM: The prophet Ezekiel (2:9–10; 3:1–3) recounts the same experience: “And He said to me: ‘Son of man, eat this scroll and go and speak to the house of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth and I ate it; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey.”

*Though the life of the prophet may be bitter and his efforts thwarted, the words of the Lord and the consciousness of his mission are sweet and joyous.*

בְּרוּךְ הַגֵּבֶר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בִּי יְהוָה יִּמְבְּטָחוּ.

## DROUGHT AND FAMINE

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to Jeremiah concerning the drought. Judah mourns and her cities are ruined. They sit in black upon the ground and the wail from Jerusalem goes up [to heaven]. Their nobles send their servants for water. They come to the cisterns and find no water. They return with their vessels empty. They are ashamed and confounded, and cover their heads.

The tillers of the soil are dismayed because there is no rain in the land. The plowmen are abashed and cover their heads. The hind in the field calved and abandoned her young because there was no grass. The wild asses stood upon the high hills and gasped for air like crocodiles; their eyes grew tired and glazed from looking for grass because there was none.

Are there any among the vanities of the nations that can bring rain? Or can the heavens of themselves give showers? Is it not You, O Lord, our God, on whom we set our hope? For You have made all these things. O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name's sake. For our backslidings are many. We have sinned against You. O, the hope of Israel, its Savior in times of trouble, why should You be as a stranger in the land, and like a wayfarer who turns aside to lodge for a night? Why should You be as an astonished man, like a mighty man that cannot save? Yet, You, O Lord, are in the midst of us, and Your name is called upon us; leave us not. [28]

## THEY LOVE TO STRAY

THUS SAID THE LORD to this people: "They love to stray, [29] they have not

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☞ [28] LEAVE US NOT: If Israel repents out of the love of God, then Israel needs no cure; if Israel repents out of fear, then it must first be healed.

☞ [29] THEY LOVE TO STRAY: *Because men are prompted by the evil impulse, because the way of the Torah is difficult if rewarding, they are often led to stray after false gods which are the work of their own hands and which do not require of them the effort and restraint, the justice and mercy, necessary to approach the "image of God" within them.*

מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל, מוֹשִׁיעוֹ בְּעֵת צָרָה, לָמָּה תִּהְיֶה כְּגֵר בְּאֶרֶץ וּכְאֹרֶחַ נָטָה לָלוֹן?

restrained their feet. Therefore the Lord does not accept them. This time He will remember their guilt and punish their sin. And the Lord said to me: 'Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, I would show no favor toward this people. Send them out of My sight and let them go. And it shall come to pass when they say to you: Whither shall we go forth? then you shall tell them: Thus said the Lord: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for famine, to the famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity.'

"Who shall have pity upon you, Jerusalem? Who shall bemoan you? Who shall turn aside to ask of your welfare? You have rejected Me. You have gone backward; therefore I stretch out My hand against you and destroy you. I am weary of relenting."

#### JEREMIAH BUYS A FIELD

AND JEREMIAH SAID: The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Behold, Hanamel, the son of Shallum your uncle, shall come to you saying: Buy my field that is in Anathoth; for the right of redemption is yours to buy it.' So Hanamel, my uncle's son, came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of the Lord. And I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the deed and sealed it, and called witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the deed of the purchase, both that which was sealed, containing the terms and the conditions, and that which was open; and I delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah in

כִּי מִי יִחְמַל עָלַיָּךְ, יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, וּמִי יָגִיד לָךְ, וּמִי יִסּוּר לְשָׁאֵל לְשָׁלוֹם לָךְ?

the presence of Hanamel, my uncle's son, and in the presence of witnesses that subscribed the deed of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the guard.

And I charged Baruch before them, saying: Thus said the Lord, God of

Israel: 'Take these deeds, both that which is sealed and that which is open and put them in an earthen vessel that they may continue many days. For thus said the Lord of hosts: Houses and fields and vineyards [30] shall yet again be bought in this land.'

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❧ [30] FIELDS AND VINEYARDS: Long ago Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Eleazar, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiba were coming up to Jerusalem after it had been conquered and destroyed by the Romans. As they arrived at Mt. Scopus, a fox ran out of the Holy of Holies and all fell to weeping except Rabbi Akiba, who was merry. The others said: "The place of which it was once written, 'The common man who comes near it shall be put to death' (Numbers 1:51) has now become a haunt of foxes. Should we not weep?"

Rabbi Akiba answered: "For that reason I am merry. In the days of the First Temple the prophets Jeremiah, Uriah and Micah prophesied that Zion would be plowed like a field and Jerusalem would become a ruin and the mountain of the house of the Lord like the high places of a forest (Micah 3:12; Jeremiah 26:6, 18, 20). Those prophecies came to pass. Now, in the time of the Second Temple, the prophet Zechariah foretold: "Thus said the Lord of the host: There shall be old men and old women in the streets of Jerusalem... the streets shall be full of boys and girls playing" (Zechariah 8:4-5). Now that the first prophecy has come to pass, I am certain the second one will also be fulfilled. Therefore was I merry."

Then the three Sages thanked him, saying: "Akiba, you have comforted us."

וּבְלִשׁוֹן הַזֶּה אָמְרוּ לוֹ: עֲקִיבָא נְחֻמָּתָנוּ, עֲקִיבָא נְחֻמָּתָנוּ.





## 9. JEREMIAH

[12-38] II KINGS [23, 24]

### BABYLON WILL RULE

IN THE FOURTH YEAR of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that was in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the word came to Jeremiah concerning Judah. Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying:

“From the thirteenth year of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, all these twenty-three years, the word of the Lord has come to me. I have spoken to you early and late, but you have not listened. The Lord has sent you all His servants, the prophets, early and late, and you did not incline your ears to hear. [1] [They urged you,] saying: ‘Turn, I pray you, every one from his

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[1] YOUR EARS TO HEAR: If you had not accepted My Law, says the Lord, I would not recognize you nor consider you more than any of the idolatrous peoples of the world.

וְשָׁלַח יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת כָּל עֲבָדָיו הַנְּבִיאִים הַשְּׂכֵם וְשָׁלוּחַ וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם, וְלֹא  
הִטִּיתֶם אֶת אָזְנוֹכֶם לִשְׁמָעַ.

evil way and from his evil doings that you may dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and to your fathers for ever and ever. Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them and provoke Me not with the work of your hands, [2] and I will do you no hurt.’”

“But you did not listen to Me,” said the Lord, “Therefore, because you have not listened to My words, [3] I will send and will bring all the families of the north, and Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, My servant, [4] and I will

bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and all the nations round about. I will utterly destroy them and will make them a horror, a scorn and a perpetual devastation. I will banish from among them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. [5] And this whole land shall be a desolation and a waste; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. [6]

“And it shall come to pass when the

🌀 [2] WORK OF YOUR HANDS: Idols and material things.

🌀 [3] TO MY WORDS: If you have done God’s will as your will, then you have not done God’s will as His will. If you have done His will against your own will, only then have you done His will as His will.

*Only when you have struggled against your own evil impulse (yetzer hara) to do God’s commandments, have you performed His will.*

🌀 [4] MY SERVANT: *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon will be God’s instrument in punishing Israel for its transgressions.*

🌀 [5] LIGHT OF THE LAMP: *The Lord will destroy all the domestic pleasures and routine: birth, marriage, laughter, the sound of corn being ground between the millstones for bread, the light of the lamp which holds back the darkness.*

🌀 [6] SEVENTY YEARS: Even if Israel is in exile, if it studies Torah and walks in its ways, it is as if it were not in exile.

וְהָאֲבֹדֵי מָהֶם קוֹל שְׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה, קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כֶּלֶה, קוֹל רֵחִים וְאוֹר יָר.

seventy years are accomplished, [then] will I punish [7] the king of Babylon and that nation for their guilt. I will make the land of the Chaldeans desolate forever. I will bring upon the land all My words which I promised against it. They also shall serve mighty nations and great kings. I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

#### THE OPPRESSORS JUDGED

THUS SAID TO ME the Lord, God of Israel: “Take this cup of the wine of fury [8] from My hand and make all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. They shall drink and reel and be like madmen because of the sword that I will send among them. You shall say to them: Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: Drink until you are drunk and vomit

and fall to rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. If they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, you shall say to them: Thus said the Lord of the host: Drink you must, for I begin the destruction with the city which is called by My name and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished! I shall call a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth.”

#### JEHOIAKIM'S REIGN

JEHOIAKIM was twenty-five years old when he began to reign. He reigned eleven years in Jerusalem and he did evil [9] in the sight of the Lord. In his days Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up and Jehoiakim became subject to him for three years. Then he rebelled against him. The Lord sent against him

☞ [7] WILL I PUNISH: *Babylon, too, will be punished for its sins, and its downfall will bring Judah's exile to an end.*

☞ [8] THE WINE OF FURY: Where you find wine you will also find stumbling.

*The cup of wine is often used as a symbol of loss of control, madness and disaster in Scripture, but it is always wine taken in excess that is implied.*

☞ [9] HE DID EVIL: When a man is appointed to office on earth, in heaven he becomes a man of evil.

שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ וְקִיּוּ וְנָפְלוּ וְלֹא תִקְוּמוּ, מִפְּנֵי הַחֶרֶב אֲשֶׁר אֶנֶכִּי שׁוֹלֵחַ בֵּינֵיכֶם.

bands of Chaldeans and Moabites and Ammonites. He sent them against Judah to destroy it. Then came up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and shackled him in chains to carry him off to Babylon. But Jehoiakim died and his son Jehoiachin became king in his stead.

#### THE LORD'S LAMENT

I HAVE FORSAKEN My house [10]; I have abandoned My heritage. I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hands of her enemies. [11] My heritage has become to Me a lion in the forest; she has shouted [12] to Me; therefore have I hated her. My heritage is to me as a speckled bird of prey and all the birds

of prey are circling around her. All the beasts of the field are gathered to devour her. Many shepherds [13] have destroyed My vineyard, they have trampled down My portion. They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it desolate and its desolation mourns upon Me. The whole land is made desolate because no man takes it to heart. [14] The spoilers came upon all the high places through the wilderness, for the sword of the Lord shall devour from one end of the land to the other, so no flesh shall have peace. They have sown wheat and reaped thorns. They have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit [15] from it. They shall be

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☞ [10] MY HOUSE: *The Temple in Jerusalem.*

☞ [11] THE HANDS OF HER ENEMIES: Those who persecute Israel never weary.

☞ [12] SHE HAS SHOUTED: *Israel has been defiant in the face of the Lord's commandments.*

☞ [13] MANY SHEPHERDS: *Bedouin bands from the east, who joined in the invasion and despoiling of Judah.*

☞ [14] NO MAN TAKES IT TO HEART: *No one heeds God's warnings through the prophets, nor is moved about the calamity to come.*

☞ [15] BUT SHALL NOT PROFIT: *The scourge that smites Israel will meet an evil fate.*

עֲזַבְתִּי אֶת בֵּיתִי, נִטְשָׁתִי אֶת נַחֲלָתִי, וְנָתַתִּי אֶת יְדִידוֹת נַפְשִׁי בְּכַף אוֹיְבֵיהָ.

disappointed in their harvest because of the fierce anger of the Lord.

Hear you and give ear, be not haughty; for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before it grows dark and before your feet stumble upon the mountains of twilight. While you hope for light, He turns it in the shadow of death and makes it thick darkness. If you will not listen, My soul shall weep in secret for your pride. [16] My eyes shall weep streaming with tears, because the Lord's flock was carried away captive.

#### JEHOIACHIN'S FATE

SAY TO THE KING and the queen-mother:  
[17] Sit down low, [18] for your beau-

tiful crown fell down from your heads. The cities of the south are shut up and there is none to open them. All Judah is carried away captive, all of it is carried away in exile. Lift up your eyes and see who came from the north. Where is the flock I entrusted in your charge? Your beautiful flock? And if you say in your heart why have these things befallen me?—Because of the greatness of your iniquity, you were stripped and exposed. [19] Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? So you may also do good [20] who are accustomed to do evil. Woe to you, O Jerusalem, how long will it be till you cleanse yourself? Will it ever be?

As I live, said the Lord, though Coniah [Jehoiachin], the son of Jehoiakim, king

☞ [16] FOR YOUR PRIDE: God exalts him who jumbles himself and humbles him who exalts himself.

☞ [17] THE KING AND THE QUEEN-MOTHER: *Jehoiachin and Nehushta.*

☞ [18] SIT DOWN LOW: *Descend from the throne.*

☞ [19] STRIPPED AND EXPOSED: Many come to the palace to see the splendor of the royal robes; others come to see the king's face; but the wise are those who come to observe the king's deeds.

[20] YOU MAY ALSO DO GOOD: The evil impulse (the *yetzer hara*) is

הִיָּהֶפֶךְ כּוֹשֵׁי עוֹרוֹ וְנֹמֵר חֶבְרָבוֹרוֹתָיו? גַּם אַתֶּם תּוֹכְלוּ לְהִיטִיב, לְמוֹדֵי הָרָע.

of Judah, were the signet ring upon My right hand, I would pluck you off, and I will give you into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and into the hands of the Chaldeans. I will hurl you and your mother that bore you to another country where you were not born, and there shall you die. But to the land to which you long to return, there you shall not return.

Is this man Coniah a despised and broken image? Is he a vessel that no one cares for? Why was he hurled out into a land which he knows not? O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord: "Write this man down as childless, [21] for none of his

children shall sit on the throne of David and rule again in Judah."

#### JEHOIACHIN EXILED

JEHOIACHIN was eighteen years old when he began to reign and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father had done. At that time Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up against the city while his army was besieging it. Jehoiachin went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants, his princes and his officers. The king of Babylon took him captive. [22] He carried out all the treasures of the House of the Lord,

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powerless against the Law. Over the man who has the Torah in his heart the evil impulse has no power.

*Though preceded by the terrible pessimism of "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" the following line, "So you may also do good who are accustomed to do evil," declares, as always, the possibility of repentance and reform.*

✎ [21] WRITE THIS MAN DOWN AS CHILDLESS: A man without children is as one who is already dead.

✎ [22] TOOK HIM CAPTIVE: Our Sages considered the first exile of Jehoiachin, before the greater exile of Zedekiah, to be a kindness of the Lord. Those taken in the first captivity were scholars, teachers and spiritual leaders. In Babylon they founded schools, organized communities and

הַעֲצָב וְבִבְיָה נִפְוִץ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה כְּנִיָּהּ, אִם כָּלִי אֵין חֶפֶץ בּוֹ?

and all the treasures of the king's house. He also cut to pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon had made in the Temple of the Lord. He also carried into exile [23] the nobles and all the mighty warriors, all the craftsmen and smiths. None was left except the poorest of the people of the land. He exiled to Babylon Jehoiachin, his mother, his wives, his princes and his chief men of the land.

And the king of Babylon made Mat-taniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his stead; and changed his name to Zedekiah.

#### SURRENDER TO THE ENEMY

AND ZEDEKIAH, the son of Josiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon had made king in the land of Judah, reigned

as king instead of Coniah [Jehoiachin]. But neither he nor his servants, nor the people of the land listened to the word of the Lord which He spoke through the prophet Jeremiah. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. So Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came, he and his army, and they besieged Jerusalem. Now Jeremiah was coming and going freely among the people, for they had not yet put him into prison. Zedekiah sent Pashhur and Zephaniah to Jeremiah, saying: "Pray in my behalf to the Lord; for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, makes war against us. Perhaps the Lord will make a miracle for us, as He has often done, and the Chaldeans will withdraw from us."

Then Jeremiah said to them: "Thus shall you say to Zedekiah: 'Thus said the

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laid down the rules of conduct for Jews in a foreign and pagan land. By the time the exiles who came with Zedekiah, the poor and ignorant of Judah, arrived, the Jewish community in Babylon was thriving, and could provide religious and communal life to keep them intact as a people.

🔗 [23] CARRIED INTO EXILE: Why was a specific time given for the first exile, but not for the second? Though the generation of the First Temple practiced idolatry, they still retained good behavior (*derech eretz*). What was *derech eretz*? Dispensing charity and performing the *mitzvot*.

אֲלֵי יַעֲשֶׂה יְיָ אֶתְנוּ כָּכָל נַפְלְאוֹתָיו וַיַּעַל מַעְלֵינוּ.

Lord, God of Israel: I shall turn back on yourself the weapons of war which are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who besiege you outside of this city. I, Myself, shall fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm.' And to this people you should say: 'Thus says the Lord: I set before you the way of life and the way of death. He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, famine and pestilence. But he who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who besiege you, shall escape with his life.'"

#### THE BROKEN AGREEMENT

THIS IS THE WORD that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after King Zedekiah had made an agreement with all the people in Jerusalem to issue an edict of emancipation. Everyone was to set free his Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no one should hold a man of Judah, his brother, in slavery. All the princes and

the others agreed and freed them. Afterward they took back their slaves whom they had set free and again forced them into service. Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: The day I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the place where they were slaves, I made this covenant with them: Every seventh year each of you shall set free his Hebrew brother who has sold himself to you; six years shall he serve you, but then you shall let him go free. [24] Your fathers, however, did not heed Me or obey Me. Today you indeed repented and did what is right in My eyes by proclaiming the emancipation of your brethren. But then you changed your mind and profaned My name by taking back your slaves to whom you had given freedom. Therefore, thus says the Lord, I now proclaim you free for the sword, famine and pestilence. The men who violated My covenant, I will make like the calf which they cut in two, between whose parts they passed. [25] I will hand

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☞ [24] LET HIM GO FREE: *According to the law of the Torah (Deut. 15:12-15), Hebrew slaves were to serve no longer than six years.*

☞ [25] BETWEEN WHOSE PARTS THEY PASSED: *Covenants were sometimes ratified by walking between the divided pieces of slaughtered animals. Symbolically, the parties to the agreement invoked upon themselves the fate of the slaughtered animal if they should violate the pact.*

הַנְּי קוֹרָא לְכֶם דְּרוֹר, נְאוּם יְיָ, אֶל הַחֶרֶב, אֶל הַדָּבָר וְאֶל הָרָעָב.



over all of them to their enemies, to those who seek their lives. Zedekiah too, and his princes, I will hand over to the soldiers of the king of Babylon who have at present withdrawn from you. I will give the command, says the Lord, and bring them back to this city. [26] They shall attack and capture it, and destroy it with fire.”

#### JEREMIAH IN THE PIT

WHEN THE PRINCES HEARD what Jeremiah spoke to the people, they said to the king: “This man must be put to death, for he weakens the hands of the men of war that remain in the city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. This man seeks not the welfare of the people but their ruin.”

Then King Zedekiah said: “He is in your hands,” because the king could not do anything [27] against them. So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the pit of Malchiah, the king’s son, which was in the court of the guard. They let Jeremiah down with ropes. There was no water in the pit, only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

#### THE KING SAVES THE PROPHET

WHEN EBED-MELECH the Ethiopian, [28] an officer in the king’s palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the pit, he went [to the Benjamin Gate] and spoke to the king, saying: “My lord, the king, these men have done evil to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the pit. He is likely to die there.”

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☞ [26] BRING THEM BACK TO THIS CITY: *The siege of the city was temporarily lifted by the Babylonians when they heard that an Egyptian army was marching to the aid of the surrounded city.*

☞ [27] THE KING COULD NOT DO ANYTHING: *Clearly there were curbs to Zedekiah’s power. He refused to authorize Jeremiah’s death, but evidently could not save him from the princes.*

☞ [28] EBED-MELECH THE ETHIOPIAN: Why is Ebed-melech, which means the servant of the king, identified as an Ethiopian? Just as he could be recognized by the darkness of his skin, so too could he be recognized by his goodness and compassion.

כִּי הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה אֵינָנוּ דּוֹרֵשׁ לְשָׁלוֹם לְעַם הַזֶּה כִּי אִם לְרָעָה.

Then the king commanded Ebed-melech: "Take thirty men with you and draw Jeremiah the prophet up out of the pit before he dies." So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the wardrobe of the palace, and took from there torn cloths and tattered rags and let them down by ropes into the pit to Jeremiah, and said to him: "Put these rags under your armpits, under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with the ropes and brought him out of the pit; and he was put in the guardhouse.

King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and received him at the entrance that was in the house of the Lord, and the king said to Jeremiah: "I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me." Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah: "If I tell you the truth, you will surely put me to death, [29] and if I advise you, you will not heed me."

Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying: "As the Lord lives, I will neither put you to death, nor hand you over to the men who seek your life."

So Jeremiah said to Zedekiah: "Thus said the Lord, God of Israel: 'If you go out and surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and your household will be spared, and the city will not be put to the torch. But if you will not go out and surrender, this city shall be given into the hands of the Chaldeans, and they shall put it to the torch, and you will not escape from their hands.'" Zedekiah said to Jeremiah: "I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hands and they shall humiliate me."

But Jeremiah said: "They will not deliver you. I beseech you, listen to the voice of the Lord in what I speak to you, so that your life may be spared and all may go well with you. But if you refuse to go out and surrender, this is what the Lord has revealed to me: You will not escape out of their hands, and your wives and your children will be captured by the king of Babylon, and the city shall be burned."

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☞ [29] YOU WILL SURELY PUT ME TO DEATH: He who has been bitten by a snake is frightened by a rope.

*Having already been cast into the pit without Zedekiah's having defended him, Jeremiah was cautious about being candid with the king.*

שָׁמַע נָא בְּקוֹל יְיָ לְאֲשֶׁר אָנִי דּוֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ וַיֵּיטֵב לְךָ וּתְחִי נִפְשֶׁךָ.

## ZEDEKIAH'S SECRET

THEN ZEDEKIAH SAID to Jeremiah: "Let no man know [30] of these words between us, and you shall not die. If the princes hear that I have talked to you, and they come to you to ask: 'Tell us, what did you say to the king; hide nothing from us and tell us what he did say to you, and we will not put you to

death,' then you shall say to them: 'I was presenting my petition before the king that he should not send me back to Jonathan's house to die there.'"

Then all the princes came to Jeremiah and questioned him; and he answered them accordingly, so they left off speaking with him. And Jeremiah dwelt in the guard court until the day Jerusalem was taken. [31]

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🔥 [30] LET NO MAN KNOW: Do not tell secrets in a field where there are mounds.

*Keeping a secret in the royal court was difficult then, as it is now.*

🔥 [31] JERUSALEM WAS TAKEN: Why is Psalm 79, which laments the destruction of the Temple and the ruin of Jerusalem, called "A Song of Asaph" instead of a dirge? Our Rabbis say it is like the mighty king who built a magnificent palace for his son, but when the son committed a grave sin, came to destroy the palace. When the king had torn down the hangings and broken the rods on which they hung, the boy's tutor sat on a stool and played a joyous song on his flute.

"Why do you rejoice at the destruction of my son's household?" the king asked.

"Because," the tutor replied, "I am overjoyed that you vent your wrath on the house, and not on your son."

So it was with Jerusalem, and Asaph said to the Lord: "I sing because You have poured out Your wrath on wood and stone, and not on Israel."

וַיֹּאמֶר צִדְקִיָּהוּ אֶל יְרֵמְיָהוּ: אִישׁ אֶל יָדַע בְּדַבָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְלֹא תָמוּת.



## 10. JEREMIAH [24-52]

### TWO BASKETS OF FIGS

THE LORD showed me two baskets of figs [1] placed before the Temple of the Lord. It was after Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, carried away captive Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of

Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the craftsmen and the smiths [2] from Jerusalem, and brought them to Babylon. One basket had very good figs. The other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten.

Then the Lord said to me: "What do

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[1] TWO BASKETS OF FIGS: A pagan matron asked Rabbi Jose: "Can your God bring near to Him any one He wills?" Rabbi Jose brought the woman a basket of figs. She chose a good one and ate it. Then Rabbi Jose said to her: "If you know how to choose, should God not know how to choose? Whomever God sees performing deeds of loving-kindness He chooses and brings near to Him."

[2] CRAFTSMEN AND THE SMITHS: *The skilled workmen.*

הָרָאֵנִי יְיָ, וְהִנֵּה שְׁנֵי דִּבְרָאֵי תְּאֵנִים מִוְעָדִים לִפְנֵי הַיָּכֹל יְיָ.

you see, Jeremiah?” And I said: “Figs.” The good figs are very good and the bad figs are so bad that they cannot be eaten.” Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “Thus says the Lord, God of Israel: Like these good figs so will I regard for good [3] the captives of Judah whom I have sent out of this place to the land of the Chaldeans. I will look with friendly eyes upon them. I will bring them back [4] to this land and I will build them and not tear them down. I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be My people and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with all their heart.”

“But like the bad figs which are so bad that they cannot be eaten,” thus said the Lord: “So will I make Zedekiah, the king of Judah, his princes and the remnant of Jerusalem, which remained in this land, and those who live in the land of Egypt. I will make them a horror and

an offence among all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, and a taunt and a curse wherever I drive them.”

#### THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

AND IT CAME TO PASS in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, in the tenth day of the tenth month, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about. So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. In the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was so sore in the city that there was no bread for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the wall of the city, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the gate between the two walls which was by the king's garden—now the Chaldeans were against the city surrounding it—and they went by the way of the Arabah. [5]

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🔥 [3] REGARD FOR GOOD: *The Lord will look with favor on the captives from Judah.*

🔥 [4] I WILL BRING THEM BACK: Rabbi Elazar said that Israel would be redeemed through five things only: calamity, prayer, the merits of the fathers, repentance and the end of days.

🔥 [5] THE ARABAH: *The deep valley of the Jordan north of the Dead Sea.*

כְּתֹאנִים הַטּוֹבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כֵּן אֶכִּיר אֶת גְּלוֹת יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּי מִן הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה  
אֶרֶץ כַּשְׂדִּים לְטוֹבָה.

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king and carried him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; and he gave judgment upon him. [6] And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. He also slew all the princes of Judah in Riblah. And he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in fetters and carried him to Babylon [7] and put him in prison till the day of his death.

#### JEREMIAH IS FREED

IN THE FIFTH MONTH, in the tenth day of the month, came Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard of the king of Babylon, and burned the house of the Lord, [8] the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem. And all the army of the Chaldeans that were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem. [9]

Now Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, gave orders concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, saying: "Take him and look after him

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☞ [6] GAVE JUDGMENT UPON HIM: *The king of Babylon punished Zedekiah for breaking his oath of alliance.*

☞ [7] AND CARRIED HIM TO BABYLON: When the Temple was burned and Nebuzaradan had gathered the people to take them into exile, the Lord said to the people: "Whom shall you want as a leader, Abraham or Isaac, Jacob or Moses? Perhaps you would like King David at your head?" And the people of Judah replied: "None of them. We want only You." Then the Lord promised: "I will go with you into Babylon and I will bring you out of there."

☞ [8] HOUSE OF THE LORD: The Temple was destroyed because of unfounded hatred.

☞ [9] JERUSALEM: When will the Lord rebuild Jerusalem? When He assembles the dispersed.

וַיֹּאסְרֵהוּ בְּנִחְשְׁתִּים וַיְבִיֵּאֵהוּ מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל בְּבֶלְזַרְדָּן וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ בְּבֵית הַפְּקֻדֹת עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ.

well. [10] Do him no harm. Treat him as he shall say to you.”

It was when they brought Jeremiah [11] before Nebuzaradan in chains among

the captives of Jerusalem, the captain of the guard said to the prophet: “Now see, I have released you this day from the chains which are upon your

🔗 [10] LOOK AFTER HIM WELL: *Nebuchadnezzar's consideration for Jeremiah was probably due to the prophet's advice to Zedekiah to surrender to Babylon.*

🔗 [11] THEY BROUGHT JEREMIAH: The king of Babylon had instructed the captain of his guard to take good care of Jeremiah but not of the people. He was not to harm Jeremiah but he could harm the people as much as he chose. He was also to fulfill whatever request the prophet made of him but to ignore the people's pleas.

When Jeremiah saw a group of young warriors chained together by their necks, he put his head in the chains and walked with them. Nebuzaradan saw him and removed the chains from the prophet's neck. Then Jeremiah saw a group of old men chained together and put his neck in their chains. Again Nebuzaradan removed the chains from the prophet's neck, and said: “Either you are a false prophet because you prophesied that this city would be destroyed, and now that your prophesy is fulfilled you are full of sorrow; or you like suffering and affliction, for you seek pain. And you love to shed blood, for if harm should come to you the king will kill me, and my blood will be on your head.” Jeremiah made no reply.

Then Nebuzaradan declared: “If you wish, come with me to Babylon and we will take good care of you there. But if you want to remain here, you may go wherever you wish.” Still Jeremiah was silent.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: “Jeremiah, if you remain here with the remnant, I shall go with the captives into exile. If you go with the captives, then I shall remain here with the remnant.”

Jeremiah promptly replied: “If I go with the captives, of what help

הָיָה רוּאָה כֶּת שֶׁל בַּחֲוָרִים נְתוּנִים בְּקוֹלָרֵין – וְנוֹתֵן אֶת רֹאשׁוֹ עַמְּהֶם.

hands. If it seem good to you to come with me to Babylon, come and I shall look after you well. But if it seem ill to you to come with me to Babylon, the whole land is before you. Go wherever it seem good to you." Then the captain of the guard gave him provisions and sent him away. And Jeremiah went to Mizpah, to Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.

#### THE MURDER OF GEDALIAH

WHEN THE CAPTAINS of the armies that were in the field together with their men heard that the king of Babylon had ap-

pointed Gedaliah governor of the land and had entrusted to his charge the men, women and children of the poorest of the land that were not exiled to Babylon, they came and joined Gedaliah in Mizpah.

But in the seventh month, Ishmael, a member of the royal family, and ten men with him came to Gedaliah in Mizpah. As they dined together there, Ishmael and the men who were with him arose and killed Gedaliah, [12] whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. Ishmael also killed all the Jews who were with Gedaliah and the Chaldean soldiers who were there. Then he carried away captive all the rest of the people

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can I be to them? Let the Lord, who can help and succor, go with the afflicted; I shall remain with the remnant." So did the Lord go, bound in chains, with the captives to Babylon, and Jeremiah went to Mizpah and joined Gedaliah.

*The midrash shows that Jeremiah was not a traitor to his people despite the fact that he had counseled surrender to the Babylonians. He saw Nebuchadnezzar as "the rod of anger in the Lord's hand." But he refused to accept favors from the enemy or even talk to him. Later, through Seraiah (51:63-64), Jeremiah predicted Babylon's fall.*

❧ [12] AND KILLED GEDALIAH: The Day of Atonement brings forgiveness for sins against God; but the Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness for sins against one's neighbor until a man has become reconciled with his neighbor.

רָאָה, כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְפָנָיו, אֶל טוֹב וְאֶל הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו לְלָכֶת - שָׁמָּה לָךְ.



that were at Mizpah. When Johanan and all the captains of the armies who were with him heard of the evil Ishmael had done, he took all the men and went to fight Ishmael. He found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon. Now the captives saw Johanan and all the captains of the armies who were with him and they were filled with joy. So they turned around and went over to Johanan. But Ishmael with eight men escaped and went to the children of Ammon.

Then Johanan with all the people who were with him went and stayed in Geruth Chimham, which is near Bethlehem, to go on to Egypt, for they were afraid of the vengeance of the Chaldeans because Ishmael had killed Gedaliah whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.

#### JEREMIAH GOES TO EGYPT

THEN ALL THE CAPTAINS of the armies and Johanan and all the people, from the least to the greatest, approached Jeremiah and said to him: "Let the Lord, your

God, show us the way we should go. Whatever He will say we shall do." After ten days the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. He called Johanan, all the captains of the armies that were with him, and all the people, and said to them: "Thus said the Lord: If you stay on this land I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you; for I regret the evil I have done to you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon [13] for I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand. But if you say: We will not stay on this land; we will go to Egypt where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the sound of the *shofar*, and we shall have no hunger for bread and there we will stay. Then, remnant of Judah, hear the word of the Lord: If you will go to Egypt to sojourn there, then the sword which you fear will overtake you there, and the famine which you dread shall follow hard after you there in Egypt; and there you shall die."

And it was when Jeremiah finished speaking the words of the Lord [14] to

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☞ [13] KING OF BABYLON: As a bee dies once it has stung, so Israel's enemy dies in disgrace once he has smitten Israel.

☞ [14] THE WORDS OF THE LORD: He who counsels the just man well is as if he had observed all the Ten Commandments.

אִם שׁוֹב תֵּשְׁבוּ בָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבִנִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶהְרָס, וְנִטְעַתִּי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶתּוֹשׁ.

all the people that all the proud men [15] said: "You speak falsely; the Lord did not send you to say to us that we should not go to Egypt to settle there." So Johanan and all the captains of the armies took all the remnant of Judah, men, women and children, and the king's daughters, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah, and they came to the land of Egypt and arrived at Tahpanhes. [16]

#### LETTERS TO THE EXILES:

#### DO NOT FOLLOW THE NATIONS

HEAR THE WORD which the Lord speaks to you, house of Israel. Thus said the Lord: "Do not learn to follow the way of the nations and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven, [17] though the nations are dismayed at them. The be-

liefs of the people are naught, because it is but a tree which one cuts out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman with an ax. They deck it with silver and gold, with silver beaten into plates which are brought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. Blue and purple is their clothing, all work of skillful men. They fasten it with hammer and nails to keep it from falling, but they are like scarecrows in a garden of cucumbers. They speak not and they must be carried, because they cannot walk. [18] Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither have they the power to do good. But the Lord is a true God. He is a living God and the everlasting King.

Thus shall you say to them [the nations]: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the

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☞ [15] THE PROUD MEN: *Presumptuous men.*

☞ [16] TAHAPANHES: *A city on the frontier of Egypt.*

☞ [17] SIGNS OF HEAVEN: *Comets, meteors, eclipses and other astronomical occurrences which the pagans interpreted astrologically, usually as signs of impending disaster.*

☞ [18] THEY CANNOT WALK: *All of this is a description of how idols are made and decorated; work of skillful craftsmen but useless and powerless.*

אל תִּירְאוּ מֵהֶם כִּי לֹא יִרְעוּ, וְגַם הֵיטִיב אֵין אוֹתָם.

earth and from under the heavens.” Not like these is the portion of Jacob. [19] He is the Creator of all things. The Lord of the host is His name and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance.

#### AFTER SEVENTY YEARS

THESE ARE THE WORDS of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the captivity in Babylon. Thus said the Lord of the host, God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and dwell in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters. Take

wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there and be not diminished. Seek the peace of the city [20] to which I carried you into exile and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you shall have peace.” For thus said the Lord: “Do not be deluded by the prophets in your midst and your diviners, nor listen to the dreams which you cause to be dreamed, for they prophesy falsely to you in My name. I have not sent them. After seventy years [21] in Babylon I will remember you and I will fulfill My good word toward you, to return you to this place. [22] You shall call upon Me and you will go in

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🕊 [19] THE PORTION OF JACOB: As a lily dies only when its aroma dies, so Israel will not die so long as it obeys the commandments and performs the *mitzvot*.

*Although the lily is plucked, it still retains its aroma; so too Israel, even in exile, will have the Torah and good deeds.*

🕊 [20] PEACE OF THE CITY: Be sure that you pray for the well-being of the government, for it is only respect for authority that saves men from swallowing each other up alive.

🕊 [21] AFTER SEVENTY YEARS: *Babylon's downfall shall come.*

[22] RETURN YOU TO THIS PLACE: Israel proclaims: Lord, even Your anger which You have brought upon me is pleasant, because in that way You cause me to return and bring me back to virtue.

וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בְּעַדָּהּ אֵל יְיָ, כִּי  
בְּשָׁלוֹמָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שְׁלוֹם.

My way, and you will pray to Me and I will listen to you. You shall seek Me [23] and you shall find Me when you search for Me with all your hearts, [24] and I will be found by you. I will return your captives and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I have driven you," said the Lord, "and I will bring you back to the place from which I exiled you."

#### THE PROMISED RESTORATION

AGAIN I WILL BUILD YOU and you shall be built, maiden of Israel. Again you shall be adorned with your timbrels and shall go out dancing with them who make merry. Again you shall plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samaria. The planters that plant shall have the use of them. There shall be a day when the

watchmen on the mountains of Samaria shall call out: "Arise and let us go to Zion, [25] to the Lord our God, for the Lord has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from the hand of him that is stronger than he." Then shall the maiden rejoice in the dance, and the old men and the young men shall make merry, for I will turn their mourning into joy and I will comfort them and make them rejoice from their sorrow.

Set up roadmarks, make yourselves guideposts; set your heart toward the highway, the way by which you are going. You will return to your cities.

Thus said the Lord of the host, God of Israel: "Once again they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and its cities, when I shall return their captivity: 'The Lord bless You, O home of righteousness, [26] O mountain of holiness.' They

☞ [23] YOU SHALL SEEK ME: From wherever one seeks God, God will answer, be it from Judah or Babylon. When a man has the need and desire for God, he will find Him. Judah Halevi, in one of his poems, wrote: "I went in search of Him and I found that He came to meet me."

☞ [24] WITH ALL YOUR HEARTS: God desires the heart.

☞ [25] GO TO ZION: *The separation of Samaria and Judah will end.*

☞ [26] O HOME OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: Was Israel created for the sake of the

עוֹד אֲבִינָךְ וְנִבְיִית, בְּתוֹלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, עוֹד תַּעֲדִי תַפִּיךְ וְיִצְאָת בְּמַחֹל מְשֻׁקִּים.

will dwell in Judah. All the cities will be settled, the plowmen and those who wander with flocks shall be without fear."

#### JOY IN JERUSALEM

THUS SAID THE LORD: "In this place of which you say: 'It is a waste without men and without beasts,' even the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem [27] are desolate; in all these places shall be heard again the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, and the voice of them who bring offerings of thanksgiving in the house of the Lord and call out: 'Give thanks to the Lord of the host, for the Lord is good; His mercy endures forever.'"

Thus said the Lord: "In this place which is waste, there shall again be a

habitation of shepherds, resting their flocks. In the cities of the hill-country, in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the south, in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks again pass under the hands of those who count them. Days are coming," says the Lord, "that I will fulfill the good promise that I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah."

#### MOTHER RACHEL COMFORTED

THUS SAYS THE LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, [28] lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel, weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted because they are gone." Thus says the Lord: "Cease your weeping and stay your eyes from tears, your effort for the children shall be rewarded. There is hope

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Law, or the Law for the sake of Israel? Surely the Law for the sake of Israel. Then if the Law which was created for the sake of Israel shall endure forever, how much will Israel endure which was created by the merit of the Law.

☞ [27] THE STREETS OF JERUSALEM: Any one may enter into the Jerusalem of the present, but only the invited may enter into the Jerusalem of the world to come.

☞ [28] RAMAH: *Rachel's tomb is near the town of Ramah.*

קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע, נָהִי בְּכִי תִמְרוּרִים, רָחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל בְּנֶיהָ.

for their future,” says the Lord. “Your children shall return to their land.”

I have surely heard Ephraim [29] be-moaning: “You have chastised me and I was chastised. [30] I was like an unbroken colt. [31] Bring me back. Let me return, for You are My God. After I was exiled, I became aware of my sins; I became ashamed, even confounded; [32] I bear the disgrace of my youth.” “Is not Ephraim My precious son? Is he not My darling child? For as often as I speak of

him, I remember him with longing. My heart yearns for him. I will surely have compassion upon him,” says the Lord.

#### A NEW COVENANT

THERE WILL COME A TIME [33] when you shall multiply and increase in the land. In those days, says the Lord, they shall say no more: The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind, neither shall they mention it, neither

☞ [29] EPHRAIM: *The Northern Kingdom of Israel, already exiled into captivity.*

☞ [30] I WAS CHASTISED: *The people accepted the exile as Divine judgment that they had sinned.*

☞ [31] AN UNBROKEN COLT: *Ephraim was wild and undisciplined.*

☞ [32] EVEN CONFOUNDED: The schools of Hillel and Shammai disputed for two and a half years about whether it would have been better if man had or had not been created. They finally agreed that it would have been better had man not been created; but since he had been, then man should investigate his past behavior, examine what he is about to do, and live a righteous life.

☞ [33] THERE WILL COME A TIME: Rabbi Jochanan said: “All our prophets foretell only what will happen in the days of the Messiah. But no eye

הָבֵן יִקִּיר לִי אֶפְרַיִם, אִם יִלְד שְׁעִשְׁוּעִים? כִּי מִדֵּי דְבָרֵי בּוֹ זָכוֹר אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד.

shall they miss it, neither shall they make another one. [34] At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord. All the nations shall gather there to celebrate the name of the Lord in Jerusalem. They shall not walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, [35] and they shall come together from the land of the north to the land I have given for an inheritance to your fathers.

There will come a time, says the Lord, that I shall make a new covenant [36] with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not like the covenant

that I made with their fathers in the days when I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt. They broke the covenant though I remained their Lord. But this is the covenant that I shall make with the house of Israel after these days, says the Lord. I shall put My Torah within them and in their hearts I shall write it and I shall be their God and they shall be My people. No longer shall every man have to teach his neighbor and every man his brother, saying: "Know your God," because they all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. I shall forgive them their iniquity and their sins shall I remember no more.

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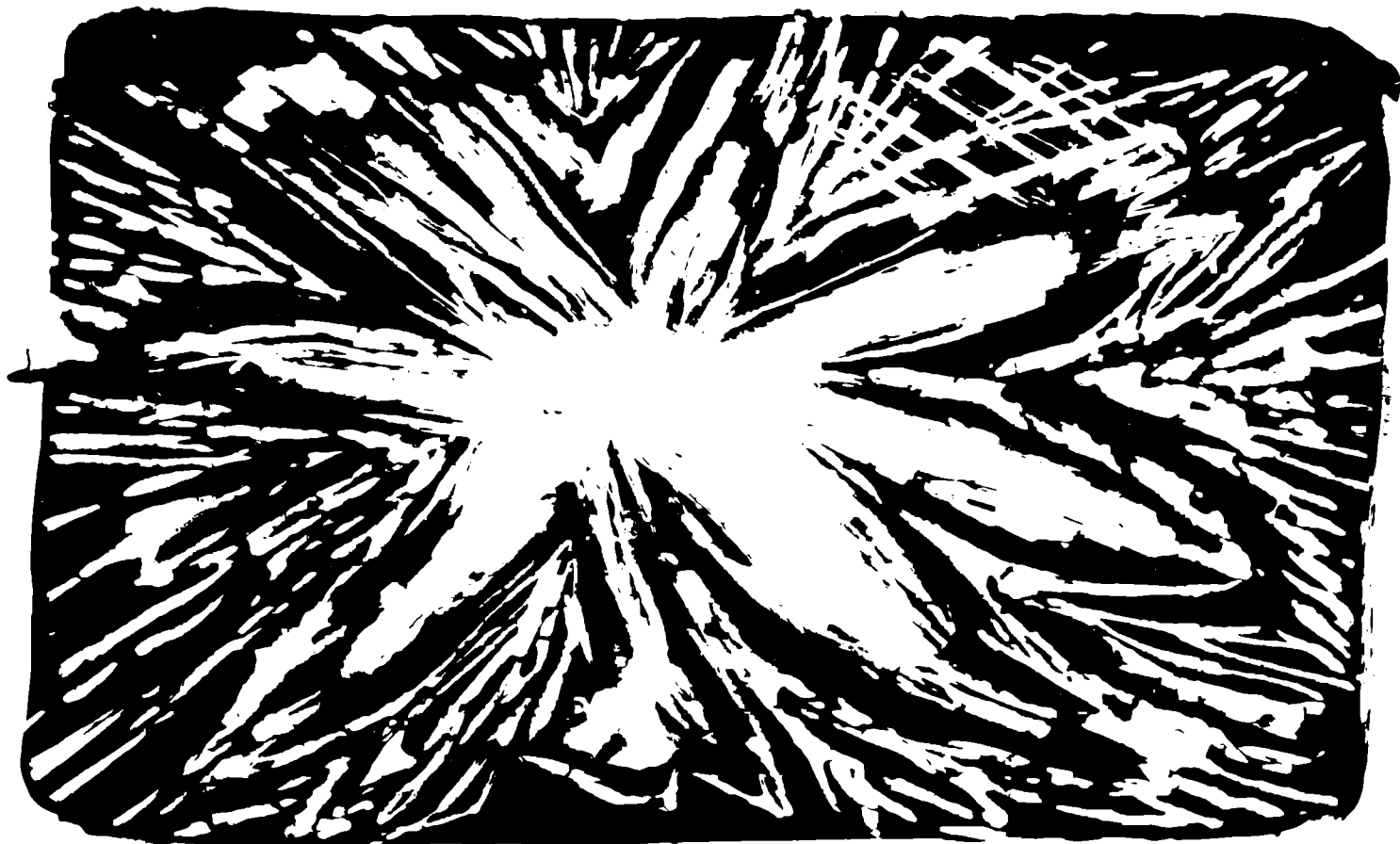
has seen and no ear has heard the world beyond the grave. Only God knows what He has prepared for those who wait for Him!"

☞ [34] THEY MAKE ANOTHER ONE: *Because all Jerusalem will be filled with the Divine presence, the Ark will lose its special meaning and there will be no need to build another. No visible symbol of God will be needed.*

☞ [35] THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL: *Israel and Judah will be joined together once more.*

☞ [36] A NEW COVENANT: *The Lord will make a new covenant with Israel which, unlike the old one, will be permanent because it will be inscribed on the hearts of the people. Israel will remain faithful and the Lord will, therefore, never reject them.*

כִּי כֹלָם יֵדְעוּ אוֹתִי לְמִקְטָנָם וְעַד גְּדֻלָּתָם, כִּי אֶסְלַח לְעֲוֹנָם וְלִחְטָאתָם לֹא אֶזְכֹּר-עוֹד.



## 11. EZEKIEL [1-22]

### VISION OF THE CHARIOT THRONE

THE WORD OF THE LORD came [1] to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the

land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; [2] and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.

It came to pass in the fifth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of

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[1] THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME: Whatever is said in the account of a vision—that the prophet heard, went forth, said, was told, stood, sat, went up, went down, journeyed, asked or was asked—even when there is a lengthy account whose details are logically connected in time, and where persons and places are referred to, the events described are to be understood figuratively. It must be assumed with certainty that the whole is a prophetic vision.

[2] THE RIVER CHEBAR: *Probably the Babylonian river Euphrates.*

הָיָה הָיָה דְּבַר יְיָ אֶל יְחִזְקִאל בֶּן בּוּזִי הַכֹּהֵן בְּאֶרֶץ כַּשְׂדִּים עַל נָהָר כְּבָר.



King Jehoiachin's captivity. I was among the captives by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. I looked up and I saw a stormy wind come out of the north, a great cloud shot through with fire, so that a radiance surrounded it. Out of the fire gleamed something like the luster of shining metal and out of the midst of all emerged the semblance of four living creatures.

This was their appearance: Every one of them had four faces, and every one four wings. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides. Their feet were straight and their soles were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass. As for the likeness of their faces, the four of them had the face of a man in front, the face of a lion on the right, the face of an ox on the left and the face of an eagle behind. Thus were their faces and their wings stretched upward; the wings of every one were joined one to another and two covered their bodies. Every one went straight forward. Where-

ever the spirit wished to go, they turned not when they went.

As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning fires of coal, burning like the appearance of torches; and there was brightness to the fire, and out of the fire flashed forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

#### THE CHARIOT

NOW, as I saw the living creatures, there was one wheel at the bottom hard by the living creatures, at the four faces thereof. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like the color of beryl; and the four had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel. [3] When they went, they moved forward on their four sides; they turned not when they went. Their rings were high and dreadful; and the four had their rings full of eyes round about. And the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

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☞ [3] WHEEL WITHIN A WHEEL: *In his vision, Ezekiel sees the Divine Chariot (merkabah) leaving, thus symbolically explaining that the Divine spirit is leaving both Jerusalem and Judah. This is the ominous forecast of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.*

וַאֲנִי בְּתוֹךְ הַגּוֹלָה עַל נְהַר כְּבָר, וּפָתַחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וַאֲרָאָה מֵרְאוֹת אֱלֹהִים.

## THE THRONE

OVER THE HEADS of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, [4] like the color of terrible ice, stretched forth over their heads.

Above the firmament [5] was the likeness of a throne which had the color of sapphire stone. Upon it was the sem-

blance of a man. From his loins upward I saw a luster like that of shining metal; from his loins downward something resembling fire with a radiance around it, resembling the rainbow that appears in the cloud on a rainy day. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell upon my face, [6] and I heard a voice of one that spoke.

☞ [4] THE LIKENESS OF A FIRMAMENT: Resh Lakish said that there are seven skies above us, each with its name and function. From the earth to the first sky is a journey of five hundred years and the same distance is between each sky above it. The thickness of each sky is also a journey of five hundred years. You can therefore imagine what a distance above the world the Lord is and what a distance from man. Yet if a man prays in a whisper the Lord hears his prayer, as if a man had spoken directly into his friend's ear. Is not the God who is so remote from the world yet so near to man?

☞ [5] ABOVE THE FIRMAMENT: Whoever speculates about four things, it would be better for him not to have come into the world. Do not ask what is above the heavens or underneath, what was before the world was created, and what will be hereafter. Search not and do not speculate about what is hidden from you; there is enough mystery for you in this world.

☞ [6] I FELL UPON MY FACE: *Ezekiel prostrated himself before the Lord.*

וַאֲרָאָה וְאָפַל עַל פְּנֵי וְאַשְׁמַע קוֹל מְדַבֵּר.

## EZEKIEL'S MISSION

HE SAID TO ME: "Son of man, [7] stand up and I will speak to you." As He spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet and I heard Him that spoke to me:

"Son of man, I sent you to the children of Israel, [8] to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; their fathers transgressed and their children to this very day are brazen-faced and stiff-hearted. [9] I sent you to them and you shall speak to them whether they listen

☞ [7] SON OF MAN: Why was Ezekiel addressed as "son of man" when no other prophet was thus addressed? Our Sages give several explanations. The Lord addressed Ezekiel as *ben adam* as an expression of familiarity and love. In Hebrew *adam* means man, but so does *enosh* and *ish*. But *enosh* and *ish* have plurals, while *adam* has only a singular. In addressing Ezekiel as *adam*, the Lord was conveying the fact that Ezekiel was singular, a unique man.

In Hebrew Ezekiel's father's name, *Buzi*, means "degraded," so that the Lord was also demonstrating that even if the family name was degraded, it was a family which performed the *mitzvot* for the love of God and the honor of Israel.

Another explanation is that the Lord called Ezekiel son of man to remind him to be humble. Because the Lord had revealed Himself in all His glory to the prophet, Ezekiel might consider himself especially meritorious and grow proud or haughty; thus the Lord reminds him that he is only a son of man, a mortal.

☞ [8] CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: *Ezekiel's mission is both to the exiles in Babylon and the remnant in Judah.*

☞ [9] STIFF-HEARTED: Why is Israel like an olive? Just as the olive gives oil only when pressed, so Israel repents only when it is pressed.

בֶּן אָדָם, שׁוֹלֵחַ אֲנִי אוֹתָךְ אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶל גּוֹיִם הַמּוֹרְדִים אֲשֶׁר מְרִדּוּ בִּי.

or refuse to listen, because they are a rebellious people, yet they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. [10]

“But the house of Israel will not consent to listen to you; for they will not listen to Me, because all of them are of a hard forehead and a stiff heart. But I will make your face as hard as theirs and your forehead hard as theirs. I will make you as adamant, [11] harder than flint; fear them not, nor be dismayed at their jeering for they are a rebellious house.”

#### THE BITTER SCROLL

“AND YOU, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that

rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I give you.” I looked and I saw a hand stretched out to me and in it there was a scroll. He unrolled it before me and it was written on both sides, lamentations, moaning and woe. He said to me: “Eat this scroll!” [12] I opened my mouth and He made me eat the scroll, and He said to me: “Son of man, swallow and digest this scroll which I give you.” Then I ate it and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. He said to me: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak what I say to them, for you are not sent to a people of a foreign tongue, but you are sent to Israel.”

Then a spirit lifted me up [13] and took me away. I went in bitterness and

☞ [10] A PROPHET AMONG THEM: *Though the people may not heed his words, at least they will know that a prophet has brought God's message to them; and they will have been forewarned of the calamity which is impending.*

☞ [11] I WILL MAKE YOU AS ADAMANT: A man should be pliable as a reed, not stiff as a cedar.

☞ [12] EAT THIS SCROLL: *This symbolic action describes Ezekiel's taking in God's message and digesting it, so that he can then speak the Lord's words to the people of Israel.*

☞ [13] A SPIRIT LIFTED ME UP: *In his vision Ezekiel is carried away to the exiles living in Babylon.*

כִּי לֹא אֶל עַם עֲמֻקֵּי שְׁפָה וְכַבְדִּי לְשׁוֹן אֶתָּה שְׁלֹחַ – אֶל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.

in raging spirit. [14] The hand of the Lord [15] was strong upon me. I came to the captivity at Tel-abib, [16] by the river Chebar, and remained there for seven days in a state of stupor.

#### THE PROPHET WATCHMAN

AT THE END of seven days the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Son of man, I

appoint you a watchman [17] to the house of Israel, and when you shall hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them a warning [18] from Me. If I say to the wicked: 'You shall die,' and you say nothing to warn the wicked man from his wicked way, to save his life, the wicked man shall die for his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand. If, however, you warn the wicked man

☞ [14] IN RAGING SPIRIT: *Ezekiel was both pained and angry to have to deliver so bitter a message to the exiles.*

☞ [15] THE HAND OF THE LORD: *The compelling spirit of his prophetic mission.*

☞ [16] TEL-ABIB: *Very likely the chief settlement in Babylon of the exiled Jews.*

☞ [17] I APPOINT YOU A WATCHMAN: If there is no vineyard, why a fence? If there is no herd, what need for a shepherd? If there is no people of Israel, what need for the prophets? Our Rabbis say that the Lord speaks to the prophets only because of the merits of the people of Israel. The people choose and appoint their leaders, but the Lord declares that leaders remain leaders only if they rule justly and righteously and educate the people. To the rulers, the Lord says: "I too have a share in your office. If the rulers do not do their duty, then punishment for the people's sins falls on their heads. But if the leaders warn and educate the people, and the people sin of their own accord, then each sinner is punished for his own sins."

☞ [18] GIVE THEM A WARNING: How long and to what extent should one go on warning another? Until he is decisively and peremptorily forbidden the act.

צֹפֶה נִתְּתִיךָ לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְשָׁמַעְתָּ מִפִּי דְבַר וְהִזְהַרְתָּ אוֹתָם מִמֶּנִּי.

and he does not turn from his wickedness, he shall die for his iniquity; but you have saved your soul. Or, if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and you did not warn him, he shall die for his sin, but his blood will I require [19] at your hand. If, however, you warned the righteous man not to sin, and he did not sin, you have saved your soul." [20]

And the hand of the Lord came there upon me, and He said to me: "Arise and go to the valley [21] and there will I speak to you." I arose and went to the valley and the glory of God stood there,

like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar. I fell upon my face. Then the spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet and spoke to me and said:

#### THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

"SON OF MAN, take a brick [22] and engrave upon it a city, Jerusalem; and lay siege against it. [23] Throw up a mound against it, set camps against it and put battering rams around it. Then take an iron plate and place it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face

☞ [19] HIS BLOOD WILL I REQUIRE: *He who can and does not save a soul is akin to a murderer. Ezekiel, therefore, may not keep silent; he must speak out in the hope that he can avert the disaster which threatens Judah, however bitter his message.*

☞ [20] YOU HAVE SAVED YOUR SOUL: Rabbi Assi said: If one merely thinks of performing a good deed, but is forcibly prevented from doing it, it is as if he had performed it; but an evil intention which does not result in an evil deed is not punished.

☞ [21] GO TO THE VALLEY: *Ezekiel is sent to a more private place where the Lord may speak to him.*

☞ [22] TAKE A BRICK: *In Assyria and Babylonia slabs of clay were used for writing.*

☞ [23] LAY SIEGE AGAINST IT: *God commands the prophet to draw on the clay slab the plan of a siege of Jerusalem with all the various elements of battle: soldiers, battering rams, observation posts.*

קח לך לבנה וחקות עליה עיר, את ירושלים, ונתתה עליה מצור.

toward it [24] and it shall be besieged. This shall be a sign for the house of Israel.

“Then lie upon your left side three hundred and ninety days, each day for a year, to bear the punishment for the sins of Israel. When you have done this, you shall lie on your right side forty days, a day for a year, to bear the punishment for the house of Judah. As for the siege of Jerusalem, fix your gaze upon the city, while your arm is bared, and you shall prophesy against it. I will place upon you cords [25] that you may not turn from one side to another.

“Then take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one pot and make them into bread for yourself. The food that you shall eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day. You shall eat it at a fixed time each day. The water you shall drink, also by measure, a sixth of a *hin* a day, also at a fixed time.” The

Lord said to me: “I shall break the staff of bread in Jerusalem and they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure in horror because there will be a want of bread and water. [26] They shall fall in a stupor and pine away in their iniquity.”

#### THE PEOPLE'S FATE

“SON OF MAN, take a sharp sword and as a barber's razor pass it over your head and beard. Then take a scale and divide the hair in three portions. Burn a third of it in the midst of the city when the days of your siege are over. Take another third and strike it with the sword all around the city. The last third you shall scatter to the wind. From them take a few and wrap them in the skirts of your robe, then take some of these and cast them into the fire. As I live,” said the Lord, “because you have defiled My

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☞ [24] SET YOUR FACE TOWARD IT: *Ezekiel is symbolically to play the role of besieger of the city.*

☞ [25] UPON YOU CORDS: *To symbolize the rigors of the siege in which Jerusalem will be hemmed in and unable to move, Ezekiel will be bound so that he too cannot move.*

☞ [26] WANT OF BREAD AND WATER: *Famine will afflict the besieged.*

קח לך חרב חדה, תער הגלבים תקחנה לך, והעברת על ראשך ועל זקנך.

Sanctuary with all your abominations, [27] I also will diminish you; neither shall Mine eye spare you. I also will have no pity. A third part of you shall die of pestilence, and consumed by famine; a third part shall fall by the sword; and a third part will I scatter to the winds. I the Lord have spoken it."

#### THE EXILE

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, you live in the midst of a rebellious people that have eyes to see [28] and see not, that have ears to hear and hear not, for they are a rebellious house. Now, son of man, prepare yourself for exile, [29] in daytime, before their eyes. Then go yourself out in the evening as though you were really going into exile. Dig a hole through the wall

before their eyes and go out by it, carrying your baggage upon your shoulders in the darkness, and you shall cover your face not to be seen, for I have set you for a sign to the house of Israel."

I did as I had been commanded. I brought out my baggage in the daytime, as though it were real baggage for exile. Then in the evening I dug a hole through the wall with my hand and went out in the dark, carrying my baggage upon my shoulders before their eyes.

In the morning came the word of the Lord to me, saying: "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you: 'What are doing?' Say to them: 'Thus said the Lord God: This prophecy applies to the prince in Jerusalem [30] and the whole house of Israel.' Tell them: 'I am your sign.' As I have done, so shall be done to them—

☞ [27] ABOMINATIONS: *The Temple had been defiled by idolatry and unrighteous practices. Manasseh was even said to have put an idol in the sanctuary itself (II Kings 21:7).*

☞ [28] HAVE EYES TO SEE: *The people of Judah have not learned either from the fall of Samaria or from the first exile of Judah. They do not see what has happened or will happen, and they do not listen to the Prophet's message.*

☞ [29] PREPARE YOURSELF FOR EXILE: *Symbolically, Ezekiel enacts the exile which will shortly be inflicted on all Jerusalem.*

☞ [30] PRINCE IN JERUSALEM: *King Zedekiah.*

אֲשֶׁר עֵינַיִם לָהֶם לִרְאוֹת וְלֹא רָאוּ, אֲזַנַּיִם לָהֶם לִשְׁמָעַ וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ.



they shall go into exile, into captivity. The prince shall carry his baggage upon his shoulders and go out in the dark. They shall dig a hole in the wall to go out through it. The prince shall cover his face so that he should not be recognized. I shall spread My net upon him and he shall be caught by My snare. I will bring him into Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans, though he shall not see it, [31] and he will die there. I will disperse to every wind all those who are around him to help him, and all his troops. I will pursue them with the sword. But I will spare a few of them from the sword, from the famine and from the pestilence, that they may tell of all their abominations among the nations where they come, and they shall know I am the Lord."

## A WILD VINE

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, in what respect is the

vine-tree which grows in the woods [32] better than any other tree of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make anything? Can even a peg be made of its wood to hang a utensil on? It is usually flung into fire for fuel. Now, when the fire consumed both ends and the very core became scorched, is it good for anything?"

Therefore, thus said the Lord God: "As the wood of the vine-tree of the forest which I have given to the fire for fuel, so do I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I have set My face against them. They were saved from fire, but now fire shall consume them; and you shall know that I am the Lord when I set My face against them. I will make the land desolate because they have acted treacherously," said the Lord.

## THE LAND IS DEFILED

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Set your face toward the mountains

☞ [31] *THOUGH HE SHALL NOT SEE IT: Nebuchadnezzar blinded Zedekiah at Riblah before taking him captive to Babylon. (II Kings 25:7; Jeremiah 39:7)*

☞ [32] *VINE-TREE WHICH GROWS IN THE WOODS: The parable of the vine and vineyard is common in Scripture. Here, God's special vine, Israel, has become a wild vine, good neither for fruit nor any other useful purpose other than to be consigned to the fire of God's punishment.*

כָּאֲשֶׁר עֵץ הַגֶּפֶן בְּעֵץ הַיָּעַר אֲשֶׁר נִתְּתִיו לָאֵשׁ לְאֹכְלָהּ, כֵּן נִתְּתִי אֶת יוֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

of Israel and prophesy against them. Say: You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God: Thus said the Lord to the mountains and the hills, [33] the ravines and the valleys: I will bring a sword upon you and I will destroy the high places. Your altars shall become desolate, your sun-pillars [34] shall be broken and I will throw your slain before your idols and scatter their bones around the altars. In all your settlements, the cities shall be laid waste, the high places shall be desolate, so that your altars may be laid waste and your idols shattered and your sun-pillars cut down and all your work blotted out.

"Yet will I leave a remnant, [35] those who escape the sword, among the nations scattered through the countries.

Those who escape among the nations, where they shall be carried away captives, will remember that I have been anguished [36] by their straying hearts which have departed from Me, and their eyes which have gone astray after idols. They shall loathe themselves in their own eyes, for the evil which they have committed in all their abominations. They shall know that I am the Lord, that it was not in vain that I said I would bring this evil upon them."

#### SOCIAL CORRUPTION

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, say to her: You are a land that is not being cleansed nor rained upon because of my indignation. Her

☞ [33] THE MOUNTAINS AND THE HILLS: *Ezekiel inveighs against the places where idols were worshiped, the high places and valleys, and warns the people that their bones will lie among the bones of the animal carcasses sacrificed to those pagan idols.*

☞ [34] SUN-PILLARS: *Obelisks built to the sun god.*

☞ [35] WILL I LEAVE A REMNANT: *If Jews were to disappear, the Torah would disappear, and God Himself would lose the most effective witnesses of His presence.*

☞ [36] I HAVE BEEN ANGUISHED: *Israel's sins have deeply grieved the Lord.*

וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְיָ, לֹא אֶל חַזָּם דְּבַרְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת.

princes are like a ravening lion tearing his prey; they have devoured souls. They seize treasures and precious things. They multiply widows in her midst. Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the differences between the clean and the unclean. They have hidden their eyes from the Sabbaths and I am profaned among them.

“Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood and destroy for dishonest gain. Their prophets have daubed for them with

whitewash, with visions, divining lies to them, saying: ‘Thus said the Lord God,’ when the Lord God has not spoken. The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery. They have wronged the poor and the needy and have oppressed the stranger unlawfully. I sought for a man among them that should put up a fence and stand in the breach before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none. Therefore have I poured out My indignation; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath. Their own way have I brought upon their heads.”

וְאֶשְׁפֹּךְ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעָמִי, בָּאֵשׁ עֲבַרְתִּי כְּלִיתִים, וְדֶרֶכָם בְּרָאשָׁם נִתְתִּי.



## 12. EZEKIEL [11-33]

### THE SINS OF THE PAST

IT CAME TO PASS in the seventh year [1] in the fifth month in the tenth day [2] that some of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord and they sat before me.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them: Thus said the Lord God: Did you come to inquire of Me? As I live, you are not worthy that I should answer your query. Son of man, judge them, judge them! Acquaint them

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[1] THE SEVENTH YEAR: *The year 590 B. C. E., the seventh year of Jehoiachin's captivity. This was four years before the Temple in Jerusalem was to be destroyed.*

[2] THE TENTH DAY: *The tenth of Ab, the day when, four years later, Jerusalem was to be conquered.*

הִלְדֹּרֶשׁ אוֹתִי אַתֶּם בָּאִים? חַי אֲנִי, אִם אֲדֹרֶשׁ לָכֶם.

with the abominations of their fathers!" [3]

"Say to them: Thus said the Lord God: On the day I chose Israel and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I lifted My hand and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob, saying: 'I am the Lord and I will bring you forth out of the land of Egypt into the land which I have selected for you, [a land] flowing with milk and honey which is the glory of all lands.'

"So I brought them out of the land of Egypt and led them into the wilderness. I gave them [there] My statutes and taught them My ordinances which, if a man observe them, he shall live by them. I also gave them My Sabbath to be a sign between Me and them that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled

against Me in the wilderness. They walked not in My statutes, they rejected My ordinances and they profaned My Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out My fury upon them in the wilderness and destroy them.

"But I withdrew My hand [and spared them]. I did it for My Name's sake that My Name should not be profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose sight I brought them out. [4]

"I brought them to the land which I lifted My hand to give it to them. Then they saw every high hill and every thick tree, and they offered their sacrifices there, and they presented their sweet offerings and poured out their drink-offerings.

"Now, say to the house of Israel: Thus said the Lord: Do you [want to] pollute yourself in the manner of your fathers

☞ [3] ABOMINATIONS OF THEIR FATHERS: *God commands the prophet to tell the elders of Israel that because they and their ancestors have committed abominations, the Temple will be destroyed and the state will fall.*

☞ [4] I BROUGHT THEM OUT: Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish taught that God's attachment to Israel could be likened to a king who fastened a chain to the key of a valuable jewel box, so that if it were lost or misplaced he could easily find it again. So did the Lord attach His name "El" to "Israel" to prevent the Israelites from being swallowed up among the nations.

וְאַתָּן לָהֶם אֶת חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת מִשְׁפָּטַי הַיּוֹדְעִתִּי אֹתָם, אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם  
וְחִי בָהֶם.

and go astray after their abominations?  
And shall I answer your inquiry, O house  
of Israel? [5]

“That which comes to your mind shall  
not come to pass at all in what you say:  
We will become like other nations, as  
other peoples of the land, to worship  
wood and stone. [6] As I live, says the  
Lord God, with a mighty hand and an  
outstretched arm, and with an out-  
pouring of rage will I reign over you.  
I will bring you out from among the  
peoples and I will gather you from the  
countries where you are scattered, with  
a mighty hand and an outstretched arm  
and with an outpouring of rage; and I

will bring you into the wilderness of the  
peoples and there will I invoke proceed-  
ings against you face to face.

“I will pluck out from among you the  
rebels and those that transgress against  
Me. I will bring them out from the land  
of their exile, but they shall not enter the  
land of Israel so that you shall know that  
I am the Lord.

“As for the rest of you, O house of  
Israel, thus said the Lord God: Because  
you do not hearken to Me, go each one  
of you and worship your idols and do  
not profane My holy Name with your  
gifts. [7] Only on My holy mountain,  
and on the mountain of the height of

🔥 [5] O HOUSE OF ISRAEL: Isaiah says (64:7), “We are the clay and Thou art our Father.” So Israel declares, “Even if we sin and You are angry, O Lord, do not forsake us. For if the potter makes a jug and leaves a pebble in it and the jug drips where the pebble is until all the fluid is lost, who is at fault? The potter who left the pebble in the jug.” Therefore, the children of Israel say to the Lord, “In us you left the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, which causes us to sin. Now we pray that You take it from us so that we can do Your will.”

🔥 [6] WORSHIP WOOD AND STONE: “Though there is nothing real in idols,” the Lord said, “no sooner does a man separate himself from them when it is as if he had drawn nearer to Me.”

🔥 [7] WITH YOUR GIFTS: It was Rachel who pleaded for the children of Israel with the Lord. The Lord knew, she said, that Jacob had worked seven years for her and that Laban had given him Leah instead. When

וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל מְדִבַּר הָעַמִּים וְנִשְׁפָּטְתִּי אֶתְכֶם שָׁם פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים.

Israel, there shall you serve Me and there shall I accept and require your heave-offerings and the first fruits of your presentations in all your holy things.”

#### THE LAND WILL NOT PROTECT

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: “Son of man, say to them who inhabit the place that shall become waste land in the land of Israel, saying: Abraham was one and he inherited the land; but we are many and the land shall surely be given us as an inheritance.

Therefore, say to them: Thus said the Lord God, you eat flesh with the blood and you lift up your eyes to your idols and you shed innocent blood: shall you possess the land? You depend on your sword, you commit abominations: shall you possess the land? Thus said the Lord God: As I live, they who are in this waste place, they shall surely fall by the sword, [8] and he who is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they who are in the strongholds and in the caves shall die of pestilence.”

Rachel learned of this and told Jacob, she gave Jacob a sign so that Jacob would be able to tell her and her sister apart. But then she pitied Leah and in the night, when they had substituted Leah for her, Rachel gave her sister all the signs which she had earlier given to Jacob. “I was not jealous,” Rachel declared before God, “and I did not put my sister to shame. If I, who am only flesh and blood and dust, did not expose Leah to shame and reproach, why should You, O loving and merciful One, be jealous of idols who have no reality in them? Why should You, because of them, send my children into exile, let them be slain by the sword, and our enemies oppress them at their will?”

Then the Lord was stirred and He said, “For your sake, Rachel, will I restore Israel to its land.”

🔥 [8] FALL BY THE SWORD: If a ruler commands you to disobey all the commandments of the Torah on penalty of death, you may disobey them all except the commandments which forbid idolatry, incest and the shedding of blood.

מִיָּד נִתְּגַלְגְּלוּ רַחֲמֵי שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ-בְּרוּךְ-הוּא וְאָמַר: בְּשִׁבְלֶךָ, רַחֵל, אֲנִי מַחְזִיר  
אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִקְוָמָם.

## THE CAPTIVES SHALL NOT DESPAIR

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, the inhabitants of Jerusalem say to your brethren in the exile, to all the house of Israel: 'You are far from the Lord so that the land is given us as a possession,' Therefore, say thus," said the Lord, "Although I have removed them far off among the nations and have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be to them as a little sanctuary [9] in the countries where they have gone.

I will also gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I shall give you the land of Israel. [10] You shall return there and remove all detestable things and all abominations there. I will give you one heart and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from you and give you a heart of flesh so that you shall walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances; [11] and you shall be My people and I shall be your God."

☞ [9] A LITTLE SANCTUARY: *The little sanctuary means the synagogues and houses of study which arose in Babylon where the Israelites studied and prayed.*

The Lord said, "Though I exiled My people and scattered them among the nations, I did not reject them and My Divine Presence remains among them. I will cause My Presence to be in their synagogues and houses of study; though they are far from My Temple in Jerusalem, they are near Me, because their synagogues and houses of study take its place.

☞ [10] THE LAND OF ISRAEL: Rabbi Hisde asked what the verse in Jeremiah, "I gave you a pleasant land, the heritage of the deer," meant. The prophet Ezekiel also uses those terms in speaking of the land of Israel. Rabbi Hanina answered that just as when a deer is slain and flayed, its skin shrinks and can no longer cover the animal's body, so too, when the land of Israel is inhabited by Jews, there is room for all, but when it is not inhabited, the land contracts.

☞ [11] KEEP MY ORDINANCES: Our Sages say that the word *basar* here does not mean flesh. The word is rather *boser*, which means to despise,

וְהִסִּירוּתִי לֵב הָאֶבֶן מִבְּשָׂרָם וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר.



## THE AVENGING SWORD

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against its Sanctuary and prophesy against the land of Israel. Say to the land of Israel: Thus

said the Lord: Behold I am against you and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked alike, and all flesh shall know that I the Lord have drawn My sword from its sheath and shall not return [it] any more. [12] Sigh,

so that the line says, "I will give you a heart that will despise your neighbor's possessions." Rabbi Aba said that in the world to come, the Lord will change man's heart so that it will not covet or envy his neighbor's possessions; he will value only what he himself owns.

Our Sages tell the tale of the man who was taken on a guided tour of Hell. There, in the dining hall, he saw people seated at tables before the most tempting delicacies, but in each person's hand there was a spoon or a fork with such a long handle that he could not convey the food from the dishes to his mouth. And each of them was emaciated and trembling with hunger, straining with all his might to put the food into his mouth, and failing.

"What kind of punishment is this?" the visitor asked. "Why don't they just feed each other? The long-handled spoons and forks are perfect for putting food into the mouth of the person who sits opposite."

The visitor was told, "These are evil people who would rather starve to death than feed their fellowmen."

✎ [12] SHALL NOT RETURN [IT] ANY MORE: Our rabbis daringly declare that only through the awareness of the children of Israel does the Lord exist in and for the world. It is written, "You are My witnesses, said the Lord, and I am God" (Isaiah 43:10). That means that if the people of Israel testify to God's existence, He exists; if they do not, He does not exist. It is also written, "To You I raise my eyes, to You who dwells in heaven" (Psalms 123:1). If not for the people of Israel raising their eyes to God, He would not be in heaven.

בֶּן אָדָם, שִׁים פָּנֶיךָ אֶל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְהִטָּף אֶל מִקְדָּשָׁיו.

son of man, sigh before them, with heartbreaking, with bitterness, shall you sigh before their eyes. And if they shall ask you, 'Why do you sigh?' you shall answer them: Because of the tidings that came. Every heart shall melt and the hands shall be limp, every spirit shall grow faint and all knees shall become weak as water. It came and it shall be done says the Lord."

The word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Son of man, prophesy and say: Thus said the Lord: A sword, a sword is sharpened and polished for slaughter. The sword is sharpened and polished to give into the hand of the slayer. Cry and wail, son of man; for it has fallen upon My people, upon all the princes of Israel. Therefore, smite your thigh. You, son of man, prophesy; smite your hands together and let the sword come down a second time, let it come down a third time, the sword of those to be slain, the sword of the great slaughter that will pierce them. Sword, show your sharpness! Turn to the right, turn to the left,

turn to wherever your face is set. I shall also strike My hands together, and I will satisfy My fury. I, the Lord, have spoken it."

#### THE GREAT EAGLES

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, intrigue them with a riddle, speak in a parable to the house of Israel and say: Thus said the Lord: The great eagle with broad wings, [13] and long pinions, full of plumage of diverse colors, came to Lebanon, plucked the topmost of its twigs and carried them into the land of the traders.

"He also took some seed of the cedar and planted it in fertile soil beside the many waters and set it as a willow that it might grow and whose branches might turn toward him and its roots under his eye. So it became a spreading vine that put forth branches and sent out roots sprawling on the ground.

"But there was another great eagle [14] with great wings and many feathers,

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☞ [13] EAGLE WITH BROAD WINGS: *Nebuchadnezzar is the first eagle, a bird of prey, which carried off king Jehoiachin (the topmost of its twigs) to Babylon.*

☞ [14] ANOTHER GREAT EAGLE: *The second great eagle is the Egyptian Pharaoh Hophra, to whom Zedekiah turned for help.*

בֶּן אָדָם, חוֹד חִידָה וּמָשַׁל מָשַׁל אֶל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.

and the vine bent its roots toward him and stretched its branches toward him from the soil in which it was planted that it might grow branches and yield fruit and become a glorious vine. Say to them: Thus said the Lord: Can such a vine flourish? Shall he not pluck up its roots and strip off its fruit and all its sprouting leaves shall wither? It will not require much strength and many people to pluck it from its roots. Indeed, it is planted, but can it flourish? As soon as the east wind touches it, shall it not wither away? [15] It shall wither away on the bed in which it grows.”

#### THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: “Say to the rebellious house: You know what these things mean: The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and took its king and princes and brought them to

him in Babylon. He took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him and put him under oath. He took away the mighty of the land so that the kingdom might be kept lowly, that it might not lift itself up, so that it would be forced to keep the covenant. But the king rebelled against him and sent his ambassadors to Egypt asking for horses and many soldiers. Will he succeed?

“Shall he break the covenant and yet escape? As I live, says the Lord God: He shall die in Babylon, in the land of the king who made him king, whose oath he scorned [16] and whose covenant he broke. I will spread My net upon him, he shall be caught in My snare, and I will bring him to Babylon. There will I judge him for his treachery against Me. All the mighty men in all his bands shall fall by the sword, and those that remain shall be scattered to the winds. You shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken.”

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☞ [15] SHALL IT NOT WITHER AWAY: *Babylonia, which is northeast of Palestine, is the east wind which will wither the vine that is Zedekiah and his kingdom; its fruit and leaves—its princes and mighty men—will be destroyed.*

☞ [16] WHOSE OATH HE SCORNE: Rabbi Eliezer said, “Yes is an oath, and no is an oath.”

וּפְרַשְׁתִּי עָלָיו רֶשֶׁתִּי וְנִתְפַּשׁ בְּמִצְדֹתַי וְהִבֵּיאוּתִיהוּ בְּכֶלֶה.

## LAMENTATION FOR THE KINGS OF JUDAH

NOW YOU TAKE UP a lamentation over the princes of Israel [17] and say: What was your mother? A lioness among lions. She crouched in the midst of young lions and reared her whelps. She brought up one of her whelps and he became a young lion. He learned to rend his prey and devour men. Then nations raised a clamor against him and he was taken in their pit and they dragged him with hooks to the land of Egypt.

She saw that she was undone and her hopes perished, she took another of her whelps and made him a young lion. He stalked among lions and learned to rend his prey and devoured men, he ravaged palaces and laid cities waste. Then the

nations cried out against him and placed their snares around him. They spread their net over him and he was taken in their pit. With hooks they put him in a cage and brought him to the king of Babylon. Then they put him into a stronghold so that his voice might not be heard upon the mountains of Israel again.

## JUDAH THE WRETCHED MOTHER

YOUR MOTHER was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the waters. [18] She was fruitful and full of branches because of the many waters. She had a strong branch for a royal scepter. She rose in her height among thick branches and was seen in her stateliness among the mass of boughs.

☞ [17] THE PRINCES OF ISRAEL: *Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, all of whom came to disastrous ends. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt in chains after ruling for only three months and died there in 608 B.C.E. Jehoiakim, his brother, who succeeded him, was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and died en route in 597 B.C.E. Jehoiachin, his son and successor, was exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar after being on the throne for only three months. Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, who replaced Jehoiachin, revolted against Babylon and was dethroned by Nebuchadnezzar and blinded and taken captive to Babylon in 586 B.C.E.*

☞ [18] A VINEYARD PLANTED BY THE WATERS: *The kingdom of Judah which was flourishing and powerful.*

וַיִּתְּהֵלֶךְ בְּתוֹךְ אֲרֵיזוֹת כְּפִיר הָיָה, וַיִּלְמַד לִטְרֹף-טְרֹף אָדָם אָכַל.

But she was plucked up in a fury. She was cast down to the ground and the east wind dried up her fruit. [19] Her strong branches withered away and the fire consumed her. Now she is planted in the wilderness in a dry and thirsty land. A fire has gone out of her branches and has devoured her boughs and now she has no strong rod to be a royal scepter. [20]

This is a dirge and became [forever] a dirge.

#### NEBUCHADNEZZAR INVADES JERUSALEM

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "You, son of man, visualize two roads set for the sword of the king of Babylon to take. Both shall come forth from one land. A sign post is set at the head of the road which clearly marks the way to the city. At the crossroads, one road leads to Rabbah, the other to for-

tified Jerusalem. The king of Babylon stood at the fork in the roads to use divination. He shook the arrows, he consulted the teraphim, and he looked into a beast's liver. [21] In his right hand was the lot Jerusalem, to open the mouth for slaughter, to lift up voices for the shout of battle, to set battering rams against the gates, to throw up mounds and to build a siege wall. It will look to them [in Jerusalem] like a false divination because they remember the oath that the Chaldeans swore to them when they made a covenant with Zedekiah. But this makes Me to remember their guilt and they shall be taken with the hand. A ruin, a ruin, a ruin will I make it."

#### THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, I am taking away from you the delight of your eyes [22]

☞ [19] THE EAST WIND DRIED UP HER FRUIT: *Until Babylon overcame her.*

☞ [20] ROYAL SCEPTER: *The royal house has been destroyed, and no heir is left.*

☞ [21] A BEAST'S LIVER: *These are the primitive superstitions connected with divination.*

☞ [22] THE DELIGHT OF YOUR EYES: *This was meant to be Ezekiel's wife.*

God creates new worlds constantly. In what way? By causing marriages to take place.

יֵעַן הַזְכָּרְכֶם, בְּכֹף תִּתְפָּשׂוּ. עֲוֹה עֲוֹה עֲוֹה אֲשִׁימָנָה.

by a stroke. Yet you shall neither lament nor weep nor let a tear fall. Sigh in silence. Make no mourning for the dead. Wind your headdress upon you and put shoes upon your feet. Cover not your upper lip and eat not the bread of mourning." [23]

I did in the morning as I was commanded and in the evening my wife died. [24] The people said to me: "Will you not tell us what the things you do mean?" I said to them: "The word of the Lord came to me, saying: Speak to the house of Israel. Thus said the Lord: I am about to profane My Sanctuary; the pride of your strength, your sons and your daughters, the delight of your eyes, that you left behind, shall fall to the

sword. And you shall do as I have done: You shall not cover your upper lip nor eat the bread of mourning. [25] Your headdress shall remain on your head and your shoes on your feet. You shall pine away in your iniquities and moan one toward the other. Thus Ezekiel shall be to you as an omen; just as he has done you shall do. When this comes to pass, then shall you know that I am the Lord God."

"And you, son of man, on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their glory, the delight of their eyes and the yearning of their souls, their sons and daughters, [26] on that day, he that escapes shall come to you with the news. On the day that the fugi-

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☞ [23] EAT NOT THE BREAD OF MOURNING: *The calamity will be so great that the ordinary methods of mourning and lament will be both inadequate and impossible.*

☞ [24] MY WIFE DIED: If a man merits it, his wife gladdens his life. If he does not merit it, she desolates it.

☞ [25] EAT THE BREAD OF MOURNING: *This is the meal of comfort brought by neighbors to the mourner after returning from the cemetery. In Hebrew this is called seudath habraah.*

☞ [26] THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS: The old have no taste and the young no power of counsel.

וְהָיָה יְחִזְקֵאל לָכֶם לְמוֹפֶת, כָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה – תַּעֲשׂוּ.

tive shall come to you, your mouth shall be opened and you shall speak and not be mute any longer. Then they shall know that I am the Lord."

#### THE FUGITIVE CAME

IN THE TWELFTH YEAR [27] of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth

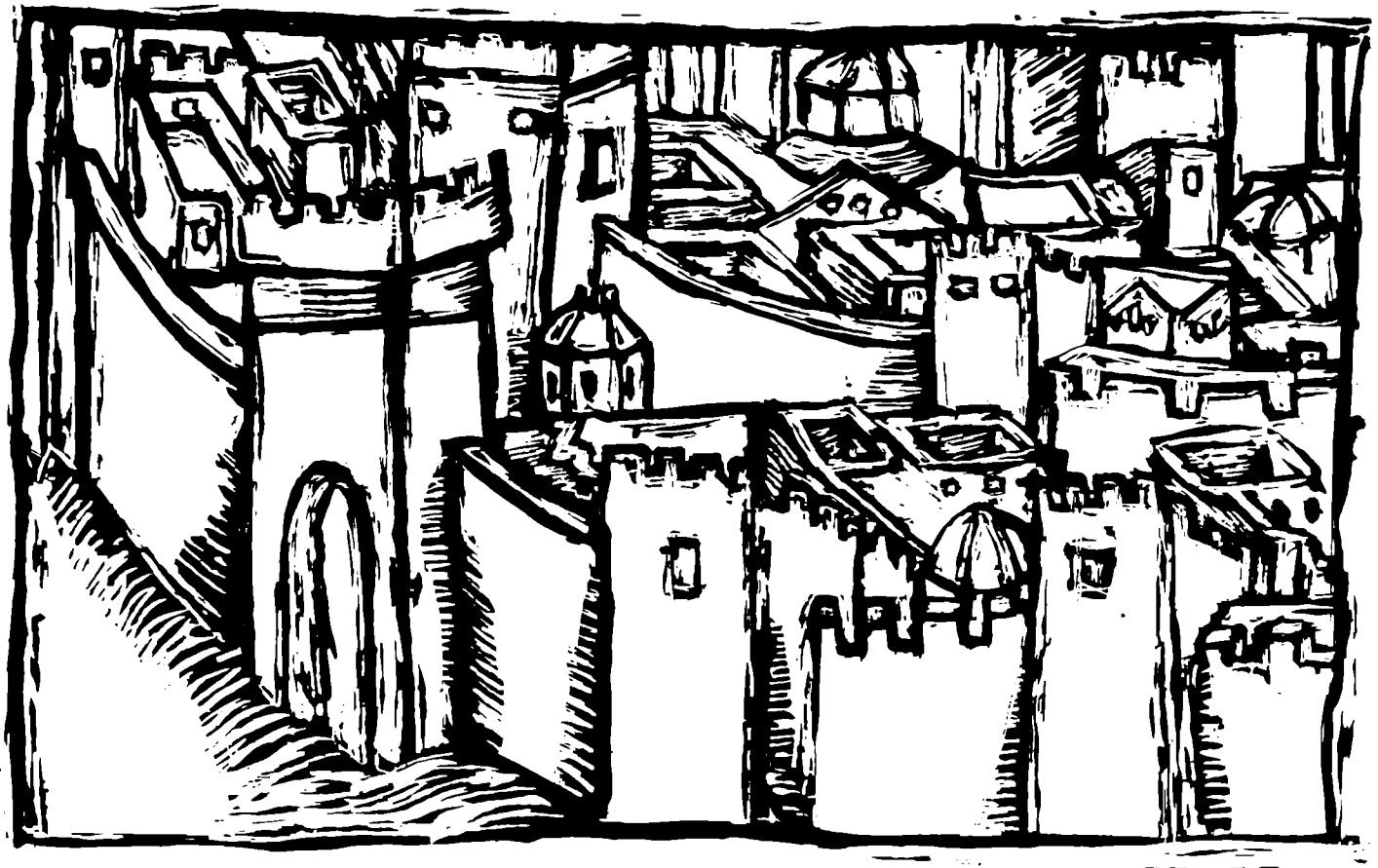
day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me, saying: "The city has fallen."

Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me in the evening before the fugitive came. He opened my mouth when the fugitive came to me in the morning, and I was no longer mute. [28]

☞ [27] THE TWELFTH YEAR: *The twelfth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, which began in 597 B.C.E. Jerusalem was conquered in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign, or 586 B.C.E.*

☞ [28] I WAS NO LONGER MUTE: *On the same day that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, Ezekiel's wife died in the epidemic which broke out among the captive exiles in Babylon. In his grief the prophet remained aware of the calamity which had befallen the nation, but none around him thought of the impending national disaster. In the death of his beloved wife—"He whose first wife dies it is to him as if the Temple in Jerusalem had happened in his time; the world darkens for him" (Sanhedrin 22a and b)—Ezekiel saw a symbol of the coming calamity. Ezekiel remained mute until the first fugitive came to report that Jerusalem had been destroyed. That was three years later, because it took Nebuchadnezzar two-and-a-half years to breach the walls of Jerusalem and six months for the fugitive to travel from Jerusalem to Babylon. After the news of the destruction of the Temple, Ezekiel began to prophesy words of comfort, and devoted his efforts to building a new community in Babylon.*

יִפְתַּח פִּיךָ וְלֹא תִאָּלֵם עוֹד, וְיִדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְיָ.



## 13. EZEKIEL [18-48]

### INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

“YOU, SON OF MAN, say to the house of Israel: You speak thus, saying: Our transgressions and our sins are upon us,

we waste away. How can we live? [1] Say to them: As I live, says the Lord God, I have no delight in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. [2] Turn, turn

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[1] HOW CAN WE LIVE: Every man should see himself as half good and half evil. By performing one more good act, he becomes a righteous man; by performing one more evil act, he becomes a wicked man.

[2] TURN FROM HIS WAY AND LIVE: Though everything is foreseen by God yet man is granted free will.

חַי אֲנִי, אִם אֶחָפֵץ בְּמוֹת הָרָשָׁע, כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּב רָשָׁע מִדְרָכּוֹ וְחָזָה.



from your evil ways. [3] Why should you die, O house of Israel?"

The word of the Lord came to me, saying: "What do you mean by using this proverb in the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord God, you shall have no more occasion to use this proverb in Israel. All souls are Mine: the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul that sins, that soul shall die. [4]

"The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him. [5] But if the wicked turn from all the sins he has committed and keep all My statutes he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his transgressions that he has committed shall be held against him; for his righteousness that he has performed he shall live. [6] Have I any pleasure at

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☞ [3] TURN FROM YOUR EVIL WAYS: Just as the Creator willed that fire and air should ascend and water and earth should fall, so He willed that man should have freedom to act and have all his actions within his power, and hence be judged according to his deeds.

☞ [4] THAT SOUL SHALL DIE: *In the captivity the exiles blamed their fathers' sins for their punishment, and Ezekiel spoke out sharply against this. A man's fate is determined by his own actions, not by those of his father or his children. The righteous will be judged righteous and the wicked will be punished. No generation will be punished for the sins of its forebears or for its descendants.*

☞ [5] THE WICKEDNESS OF THE WICKED SHALL BE ON HIM: Only if the children are like their fathers and sin against the Almighty will they suffer for their fathers' sins as well as for their own.

☞ [6] HE SHALL LIVE: Woe will come to me from my Creator if I obey my impulses. And woe to me from my impulses if I obey my Creator.

אבות יאכלו בסר ושני הפנים תקהינה.

all that the wicked should die? says the Lord; and not rather that he should return from his ways and live? [7]

“You, son of man, say to your people, the righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him on the day of his transgression; and the wickedness of the wicked man shall not bring his downfall in the day of his turning away from his wickedness. When I say to the righteous man that he shall surely live, if then he

relies upon his righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered; but for the iniquity that he committed shall he die. [8] Again, when I say to the wicked: ‘You shall surely die,’ and he turn from his sin and does justice and righteousness, if the wicked returns the pledge, [9] gives back what he had taken by robbery, [10] follows the statutes which lead to life, commits no iniquity, he shall

🔥 [7] RETURN FROM HIS WAYS AND LIVE: It is written, “Good and upright is the Lord, therefore He will instruct sinners in the way” (Psalms 25:8). They asked Wisdom, “What shall be the punishment of the sinner?” Wisdom answered. “Evil pursues sinners” (Proverbs 13:21). They asked Prophecy. It replied, “The soul that sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). They asked the Law. It replied, “Let him bring a sacrifice” (Leviticus 1:4). They asked God, and He replied, “Let him repent, and obtain his atonement. My children, what do I ask of you? Seek Me and live.”

🔥 [8] SHALL HE DIE: If one sins, saying, I shall sin and repent, sin and repent, then no opportunity will be given to him to repent.

🔥 [9] RETURNS THE PLEDGE: When repentance is derived from fear, premeditated sins are counted as errors; when repentance is so great because it is derived from the love of God, premeditated sins are counted as though they were merits.

🔥 [10] WHAT HE HAS TAKEN BY ROBBERY: He who robs the public cannot win full forgiveness through repentance, because he does not know to whom he must make restitution.

צִדְקַת הַצַּדִּיק לֹא תַצִּילֵנוּ בְּיוֹם פְּשָׁעוֹ, וְרָשָׁעַת הָרָשָׁע לֹא יִכָּשֶׁל בָּהּ בְּיוֹם שׁוּבוֹ  
מִרְשָׁעוֹ.

surely live; he shall not die. [11] None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him, because he has done that which is just and right; therefore, he shall surely live.

“Yet your people say: The way of the Lord is not fair. O house of Israel, your way is not fair. I judge each according to his ways.” [12]

#### THEY HEAR BUT DO NOT OBEY

“AS FOR YOU, son of man, your people who talk about you by the walls and in the doors of the houses, they speak to one another: Come and hear the word that

comes from the Lord. They come to you in a crowd and sit before you as My people, and hear your words but heed them not. [13] You are to them as a love song, as one that has a beautiful voice and can play well on an instrument. They hear your words, but they do them not. When this comes to pass, they shall know that a prophet was among them.”

#### THE VISION OF THE DRY BONES

THE HAND of the Lord was upon me and the Lord carried me by the spirit and set me down in the midst of a valley, and it was full of bones. [14] He led me all

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- ☞ [11] HE SHALL NOT DIE: Rabbi Alexander said that if a mortal man uses broken vessels it is a disgrace. But for God it is otherwise, because all His servants are broken vessels, as it is said, “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and the contrite of spirit will He save.”
- ☞ [12] EACH ACCORDING TO HIS WAYS: All the judgments of the Holy One, blessed be He, are on the basis of measure for measure.
- ☞ [13] BUT HEED THEM NOT: He whose deeds exceed his wisdom is like a man who rides a horse with a bridle and reins; he can direct the horse as he wills. But he whose wisdom exceeds his deeds is like a man who rides a horse without either rein or bridle.
- ☞ [14] FULL OF BONES: Rabbi Judah said that the story that Ezekiel brought the dead to life is true, but a parable. Then Rabbi Nehemiah asked, “If it is true, then it cannot be a parable; and if it is a parable, then it cannot be true.” Then Rabbi Judah answered, “Truly, it is a parable; and truly it happened and is the fate of Israel.”

הִתְהַלְכְּתִי עַל־יָדַי וַיּוֹצִיאֵנִי בְרוּחַ יְיָ וַיְנִיחֵנִי בְּתוֹךְ הַבְּקָעָה, וְהִיא מְלֵאָה עַצְמוֹת.

around them and I saw that there were many of them in the open valley and they were very dry. And He said to me: "Son of man, can these bones live?" I answered: "Lord, only You know." He said to me: "Prophecy over these bones and say to them: O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus said the Lord God to these bones: I will put sinews upon you and will bring up flesh upon you. I will cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you shall live, that you shall know that I am the Lord."

I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied there was a noise and a commotion and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked and there was sinew upon them and flesh came up and skin covered them above but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me: "Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy,

son of man, and say to the breath: Thus said the Lord God: Come from the four ends of the earth. Come breath and breathe life into these corpses that they may live."

So I prophesied as He commanded and breath came into them and they lived and stood up upon their feet, a great host. Then He said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say: We are dried up bones, and our hope is lost. We are completely cut off. Therefore prophecy to them and say: Thus said the Lord God: I will open your graves and raise you up out of your graves and bring you to the land of Israel. [15] I will put My spirit in you and you shall live, and I will settle you in your own land; [16] and you shall know that I the Lord have spoken and performed it, says the Lord."

❧ [15] THE LAND OF ISRAEL: Rabbi Eliezer said that whoever dies outside of the land of Israel will be brought to Israel and resurrected when the time comes. It was customary to put a clod of earth from the land of Israel on the coffin of all those who died outside of the land of Israel, and later to put a little bag of earth from the soil of Israel under the dead man's head.

❧ [16] IN YOUR OWN LAND: Ezekiel's prophecy that Israel would be restored was the most heartening prophecy he could bring to the exiles. The vision of the dry bones brought to life was a forecast of the resurrection of the children of Israel and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

מֵאֲרֵבַע רוּחוֹת בּוֹאֵי הָרוּחַ וּפָחִי בַהֲרוּגִים הָאֵלֶּה – וַיְחִיּוּ.

## RESTORATION OF THE LAND

YOU MOUNTAINS of Israel, hear the word of the Lord. Thus said the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, to the streams and the valleys, to the desolate wastes and the abandoned cities which have become a prey and a derision to the nations that are round about. Therefore, thus said the Lord God: "I have lifted up My hand that the nations round about you shall bear their shame. But you mountains of Israel put forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, because soon they will come back. I am with you. I shall look to you and shall see that you shall be tilled and sown. The cities shall be inhabited and the waste places shall be rebuilt. [17] I will multiply men and beasts upon you and they shall increase and be fruitful. I will settle you, as in former days, and I will do better to you than at your be-

ginnings; and you will know that I am the Lord."

## THE PEOPLE REGENERATED

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land they defiled it by their doings. So I poured out My fury upon them for the blood which they shed upon the land and because they had defiled it with their idols. I scattered them among the nations and dispersed them through the countries. According to their ways and their doings I judged them.

"When they came among the nations, wherever they came, they profaned My holy Name in that men said to them: 'These are the people of the Lord and yet they were driven out of their land.' I had concern for My holy Name which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations [18] where they came. Therefore,

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☞ [17] THE WASTE PLACES SHALL BE REBUILT: *The first steps in Israel's regeneration will be the regeneration of the despoiled land and the desolate cities.*

☞ [18] PROFANED AMONG THE NATIONS: The pagan neighbors of Jews never returned anything they found which belonged to a Jew, and so it was decided that legally a Jew might also keep the possessions of pagans

וְהוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶתְכֶם כְּקִדְמוֹתֵיכֶם וְהִטִּיבוֹתִי מְרִאשׁוֹתֵיכֶם וַיִּדְעֻם כִּי אֲנִי יְיָ.

say to the house of Israel: Thus said the Lord: It is not for your sake that I am doing this, O house of Israel, but for My holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. I will sanctify My great Name [19] that has been profaned among the nations; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, when I will be sanctified in you before their eyes.

“I will take you out of the nations and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit

[20] will I put within you. I will remove the heart of stone out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh. I will put My spirit within you and make you follow My statutes and you shall keep My ordinances and do them. And you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers. Then you shall be My people and I shall be your God.”

#### THE KINGDOMS REUNITED

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: “You, son of man, take a piece of

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which he found. Some rabbis, however, declared that it glorified God’s Name to return such things nonetheless.

Simeon ben Shetah bought a donkey and under its saddle discovered a pearl. He returned the pearl to the Arab from whom he had bought it and the Arab exclaimed, “Blessed be the God of Israel.” The rabbi’s students asked why he had not kept the pearl, in accordance with the law. And the rabbi replied, “Am I then a pagan? His blessing is worth more to me than all the money the pearl might have brought.”

🔥 [19] MY GREAT NAME: Rabbi Johanan ben Berokah said, “If a man profanes the Name of God secretly, he will be repaid openly. In the profanation of the Name, there is no distinction between the inadvertent and the presumptuous.”

🔥 [20] A NEW SPIRIT: Our Sages say that when the children of Israel will live peacefully among themselves and become as brothers to one another, they will then be worthy to be redeemed.

וְיִשְׁבְּתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וְהִיְתֶם לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים.

wood [21] and write upon it: 'Judah and all that belongs to it.' Then take another piece of wood and write upon it: 'Israel and all that belongs to it.' Then join them together so as to form a single plank in your hand. When your people shall ask you, saying, 'Will you tell us what you mean by this?' say to them: Thus said the Lord God: I will take the children of Israel out from among the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel and one king shall be king over them. My servant David shall be king over them. Neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any longer. I will make a covenant of peace with them and it shall be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and multiply them and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. I will be their God and they shall be My people. When My sanctuary shall be in their midst forever, then shall the nations

know that I am the Lord that sanctifies Israel."

#### REBUKE TO SELFISH LEADERS

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. [22] Prophesy and say to them: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have fed none but themselves. Should not the shepherds feed the sheep? You have fed on the milk and have clothed yourself with the wool. You have killed the fatlings, but you have not tended the flock. You have not strengthened the weak, neither have you healed the sick, neither have you bound up the wounded, neither have you brought back the strayed, neither have you sought out the lost. You ruled over them with force and rigor. So they scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food to all the beasts of the field. My sheep wandered through all the mountains and upon every high

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☞ [21] A PIECE OF WOOD: *A symbolic scepter representing the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.*

☞ [22] SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL: *For Israel to be revived and restored, it must have virtuous and responsible leaders. Ezekiel here condemns Israel's past rulers and promises better ones in the future.*

וְעַבְדִּי דָוִד מֶלֶךְ עֲלֵיהֶם וְרוּעָה אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לְכֻלָּם.

hill. My flock was scattered over all the earth and there was none to seek and search for them. [23]

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus said the Lord God: I am against the shepherds. I will require My sheep at their hands and I will stop them from feeding the sheep. I will deliver My sheep from their mouths that they may not be food for them.”

Thus said the Lord: “Here I am and I will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd searches for his flock in the day when they are scattered, so will I seek out My sheep. I will deliver them out from all the nations and gather them from all the countries and bring them into their own land. I will feed My sheep. I Myself will lead them to their pasture,” says the Lord. “I will seek out the lost, I will bring back those who are strayed, I will bind up the wounded, I

will strengthen the sick, I will watch over the fat and the strong ones. I will feed them with justice. [24]

“As for you, My flock,” thus said the Lord God: “I will judge between the sheep and the rams and the he-goats. Is it not enough for you to have fed on good pasture but must you trample down with your feet the rest of the pasture? You drink clear waters, but must you foul the rest with your feet? My sheep have to eat that which you have trampled with your feet and drink that which you have fouled.” [25]

#### THE IDEAL SHEPHERD

THEREFORE says the Lord God: “I will judge between the fat and lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder and huff all the weak with your horns, therefore will I help My flock and they

☞ [23] NONE TO SEEK AND SEARCH FOR THEM: A shepherd protects his flock from lions, wolves and other enemies; so too must a leader protect his people from all enemies and lead them to obey the law.

☞ [24] I WILL FEED THEM WITH JUSTICE: How unique is the lamb that can survive among seventy wolves!

☞ [25] WHICH YOU HAVE FOULED: God revealed the earth in His wisdom, and He prepared the world for His congregation.

כְּבִקְרַת רוּעָה עָדְרוּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּתוֹךְ צֹאנֹו נִפְרָשׁוֹת, כִּן אֶבְקֵר אֶת צֹאנִי.



shall no longer be a prey. [26] I will judge between sheep and sheep. [27] I will set up one shepherd over them to tend them, that is My servant David. [28] He shall tend them and be their shepherd. I will make a covenant of peace with them and I will banish the wild beast out of the land so they may live safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will send down the rain in its season. The tree of the field shall yield its fruit and the earth shall yield its produce; and they shall be safe in their land. And they shall know that I am the Lord when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them out of the hand of those who enslaved them.

“You, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are man and I am your God,” said the Lord God.

#### THE LAND OF MAGOG

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: “Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, [29] the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him.” Thus said the Lord God: “It shall come to pass in that day that thoughts shall come into your mind and you shall devise an evil design. You shall say: I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. [30] I will come upon them who are peaceful peo-

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☞ [26] SHALL NO LONGER BE A PREY: The life of a man is not true life if he does not help his fellowman.

☞ [27] SHEEP AND SHEEP: *The Lord will judge between the poor oppressed (the lean sheep) and the rich oppressors (the fat sheep), between good and evil.*

☞ [28] MY SERVANT DAVID: *When the Messiah comes, a leader, like David, will rule justly and wisely.*

☞ [29] THE LAND OF MAGOG: *But before the end of days arrives, there will be one great invasion by Gog, of the land of Magog. Gog has been variously interpreted as Babylon, Crete, and the Scythians; but most likely Gog was an apocalyptic and symbolic figure rather than a historical one.*

☞ [30] UNWALLED VILLAGES: *This defenselessness will prompt Gog to war.*

וְנָתַן עֵץ הַשִּׁדָּה אֶת פְּרִי וְהָאָרֶץ תִּתֵּן יְבוּלָהּ וְהָיוּ עַל אֲדָמָתָם לְבִטָּח.

ple who all live in villages without walls, having neither bars nor gates, to take the spoil and to take the prey; to turn your hand against the waste places that are now reinhabited, against the people that are gathered from the nations, who dwell in the hilly country and who peacefully raise cattle. The traffickers of Sheba and Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish shall say to you: Have you come to despoil them? Have you assembled your army to take prey? To carry away the gold and silver, to take away cattle and goods, to take great spoil? [31]

You bestirred yourself and came from the uttermost part of the north with a great host, all of them riding upon horses, a mighty array. You came against My people Israel as a cloud covering the land. Thus said the Lord God: You are

the one of whom I spoke in olden times through My servants, the prophets of Israel that prophesied in those days that I will bring you against them. But it shall come to pass in that day when Gog shall come up against the land of Israel, My fury shall be roused. In My indignation and the fire of My wrath I swear that on that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, so that the fishes in the sea, the birds in the air, the beasts in the field and all things that creep on the ground, and all men that are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the towers shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. I will call a sword against him throughout all My mountains, said the Lord God, every man's sword shall be against his

🌀 [31] TO TAKE GREAT SPOIL: When Alexander the Great asked to enter the gates of Paradise, he was told that only the righteous could enter. He then asked for a gift, and a piece of a human skull with one eye open was thrown to him. Alexander wished to weigh it on his scales and placed it on a balance with gold and silver, but no matter how much gold he added, the skull was always heavier. Then the Sages advised him to put a clod of earth on the eye, and at once the gold in the balances became heavier than the skull. "This teaches," the Sages told Alexander, "that a human eye is not satisfied with all the gold that exists until it is covered with the earth of the grave."

וְרָעֲשׂוּ מִפְּנֵי דָגֵי הַיָּם וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְחַיֵּית הַשָּׂדֶה וְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרוֹמֵשׁ עַל הָאֲדָמָה  
וְכָל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

brother. [32] I will punish him with pestilence and with blood. I will rain upon him and his bands, and upon the many peoples that are with him, a lashing rain, fire and brimstone. Thus will I magnify Myself and sanctify Myself and make Myself known in the eyes of the many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord.

#### AFTER THE DEFEAT OF GOG

YOU SHALL FALL on the mountains of Israel, you and all your bands, and the

peoples who are with you. I will give you to be devoured by ravenous birds of every sort and the beasts of the field. Then it shall come and it shall be in the day I have predicted that they who live in the cities of Israel shall go out and make firewood of their weapons and use them as fuel. [33] They shall collect the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, the handpikes and the spears, and for seven years they shall make firewood of them. For seven years they shall not need to take wood from the fields, neither cut down any out of

❧ [32] EVERY MAN'S SWORD SHALL BE AGAINST HIS BROTHER: Two men are traveling in the desert but only one of them has a waterskin. If only one of them drinks, he will reach civilization. The son of Petura taught that it is better that both should die and neither live to see his brother's death. But then Rabbi Akiba came and taught: Your life takes precedence over his.

❧ [33] USE THEM AS FUEL: A rabbi stood in the marketplace when Elijah the prophet appeared to him. The rabbi asked, "Is there anyone here in this marketplace who will have a share in the world-to-come?" Elijah replied that there was not. Just then two men came into the square, and Elijah remarked that those two would have a share in the world-to-come. The rabbi turned to the two men and asked them, "What is your occupation?" They answered, "We are merry-makers. When we see men troubled we cheer them. And when we see men quarreling we make peace between them."

וּבְעָרוֹ וְהִשְׁקוּ בְּנֹשֶׁק וּמִגֵּן וְצֶנֶה, בְּקִשְׁתֹּת וּבַחֲצִים וּבַמִּקְלֵ יָד וּבַרִמָּח, וּבְעָרוֹ  
בָּהֶם אֵשׁ שִׁבַּע שָׁנִים.

the forests, for they shall make fires of the weapons. [34] Thus will I set My glory among the nations, and all nations shall see My judgment that I have executed and My hand that I have laid upon them. From that day forward the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God.

#### THE LIFEGIVING STREAM

IN THE FIVE AND TWENTIETH YEAR of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city had fallen, [35] in the selfsame day, the hand of the Lord was upon me and He brought me in a vision to the land of Israel. He set me down upon a very high mountain, and in front of me was the outline

of a city. He brought me there, and there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of shining bronze, with a measuring line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand. [36] He stood at the gate and said to me: "Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears and set your heart upon what I know. You were brought here in order that I might show them to you; and then for you to declare what you see to the house of Israel."

I saw a wall on the outside of the house. He brought me to the gate which looked toward the east. Then he brought me to the porch of the house and measured each post of the porch. Then he brought me to the Temple and measured the posts. He went inward and measured each post of the entrance. He measured its length, it was twenty cubits, and the

☞ [34] MAKE FIRES OF THE WEAPONS: For seven full years after the defeat of Gog, the people of Israel will need no wood from the forests for making fires. Instead, they will build their fires from the handles of the knives, spears and swords of the enemy. Those seven years will be joyous as a wedding feast, a feast of joy to the righteous.

☞ [35] THE CITY HAD FALLEN: *Jehoiachin was captured in 597 B.C.E., so that the time now is 572.*

☞ [36] A MEASURING ROD IN HIS HAND: *Prophecy is given in either a dream or a vision. When a prophet is inspired, he may perceive an allegory, or he may in a prophetic vision perceive that God speaks to him, or he hears an angel addressing him, and sees him also.*

בֶּן אָדָם, רָאָה בְּעֵינָיָהּ וּבְאַזְנוֹתָיָהּ שָׁמָע, וְשִׁים לִבָּהּ לְכָל אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מֵרָאָה אוֹתָהּ.

width twenty cubits before the Temple. He said: "This is the most holy place."

He returned me to the door of the Temple and I saw water flowing from under the threshold of the house eastward, for the forefront of the house looked toward the east. He brought me out by the way of the gate that looked east. When the man went out eastward with the line in his hand he measured a thousand cubits and made me pass through the waters. The waters came up to my ankles. Again he measured a thousand cubits and made me pass through the waters. The waters came up to my knees. Again he measured a thousand cubits and made me cross the waters. The waters came up to my loins. Again he measured a thousand cubits and it was a river that I could not pass through. Then he said to me: "Have you seen this, son of man?" Then he led me and brought me to the bank of the river and I saw many trees growing on both sides.

He said to me: "These waters go forth to the eastern region and they shall reach to the Arabah and when they fall into the sea, into the sea of bitter waters, the waters shall be healed. Then every living creature shall live in it. Fishermen shall stand on its shore. There shall be a place for the spreading of nets. Fish of all sorts will be plentiful, like those of the Great Sea. But the [water in the] marshes and swamps shall not become fresh. It shall be left for the supply of salt. On both banks of the river shall grow every kind of tree for food. The leaves on the trees shall never wither, neither shall the fruit of the trees ever fail. Every month the trees shall bear fresh fruit because the water that feeds them flows from the Sanctuary. Their fruit shall be for food and their leaves for healing.

"The circumference of the city shall be eighteen thousand cubits [37] and from that day the name of the city shall be 'The Lord is There.'"

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סג [37] EIGHTEEN THOUSAND CUBITS: Abaye said: The world must contain no fewer than thirty-six righteous men in each generation, who are vouchsafed the sight of the *shechinah*. Rabba said: The righteous standing immediately before the Holy One, blessed be He, consist of 18,000, for it is written: "It shall be eighteen thousand round about." The thirty-six refer to those who see the Lord in a bright mirror; the 18,000 those who contemplate Him in a dim one.

לְחִדְשֵׁי יְבֶכֶר כִּי מִיָּמֹו מִן הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הָמָּה יוֹצְאִים, וְהָיָה פָּרִיו לְמֶאֱכָל וְעֹלָהוּ  
לְתְרוּפָה.



## 14. HOSEA [I-I4]

THE WORD OF THE LORD that came to Hosea, son of Beeri, [I] in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel.

### THE MARRIAGE OF HOSEA

WHEN THE LORD FIRST SPOKE to Hosea, the Lord said to him: "Go and take a wife who will become a harlot [2] and

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[I] SON OF BEERI: Hosea's father was a prophet who prophesied only two verses (Isaiah 8:19-20): "When they will say to you: Consult the ghosts and the spirits that chirp and gibber: should not a people consult their God? But, on behalf of the living, they consult the dead." The children of Israel should turn to the Torah for instruction, and if they will not, then there is no light of dawn.

[2] WHO WILL BECOME A HARLOT: *Some of the rabbis believe the command to be allegorical, and others believe it to be a command which Hosea did in*

דִּבֶּר יְיָ, אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל הוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן בְּעֹרִי.

have the children of a harlot, for the land has committed great harlotry in turning away from the Lord.” [3]

So Hosea went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. She conceived and bore him a son. And the Lord said to him: “Call his name Jezreel; [4] for yet

a little while and I will demand the blood of Jezreel from the house of Jehu, and I will bring to an end the house of Israel. On that day will I break the power of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.”

Then Gomer conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to Hosea:

*fact obey, so that the people would see their waywardness and infidelity in his action. This was to be the symbol of Israel's apostasy.*

☞ [3] FROM THE LORD: When the Lord said to Hosea: “Your children have sinned. What shall I do to them?” Hosea should have replied, “They are Your children, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Show them Your mercy.” But instead Hosea said, “Sovereign of the universe, the whole world is Yours. Exchange them for a different nation.”

Then the Lord said, “I shall order him to marry a woman of harlotry and beget three children by her. Then will I command him to send her away from his presence, so that he will understand.”

After two sons and a daughter were born to Hosea, the Lord commanded Hosea to part with Gomer. Hosea pleaded that she had borne him children and that he could neither cast her out nor divorce her. Then the Lord said, “If you, whose wife is a harlot so that you cannot know whether your children are your own or belong to others, cannot exchange your wife for another, how can you tell Me to exchange Israel, who are My children, for another people?”

Hosea saw that he had sinned and begged for mercy, but the Lord rebuked him again, saying, “Instead of pleading for mercy for yourself, plead for mercy for Israel.” So Hosea began to bless Israel and to speak his prophecies of comfort.

☞ [4] JEZREEL: *This means “God sows.”*

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, וְשִׁבְרֹתַי אֶת קֶשֶׁת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵמֶק יִזְרְעֶאל.

“Call her name Lo-ruhamah; [5] for I will not again have compassion upon the house of Israel that I should ever forgive them.”

When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah she conceived and bore a son. And He said to him: “Call his name Lo-ammi, [6] for you are not My people and I am not your God.”

#### ISRAEL: THE FAITHLESS WIFE

Plead with your mother, plead;  
Let her put away her harlotry from  
her face,  
And her adultery from between her  
breasts; [7]  
Lest I strip her naked,  
And set her naked as the day she  
was born,

And make her like a desert,  
And set her in a dry land,  
And leave her to die of thirst.  
I will have no compassion on her  
children;  
For they are the children of harlotry  
Because their mother played the  
harlot;  
She bore them and has acted shame-  
fully. [8]  
She said: “I will follow my lovers,  
Who give me my bread and my  
water,  
My wool and my flax, my oil and  
my wine.”  
But she did not know that it was I  
that gave her  
The corn and the wine and the oil;  
And the silver and gold which I  
multiplied for her,

🌀 [5] LO-RUHAMAH: *The name means “the unpitied one,” and very likely this child was illegitimate.*

🌀 [6] LO-AMMI: *The name means “not My people.”*

🌀 [7] FROM BETWEEN HER BREASTS: *In those days harlots painted their faces and carried a talisman on a chain around their necks, which fell between their breasts and identified them as harlots.*

🌀 [8] HAS ACTED SHAMEFULLY: Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Jose: “Better one self-reproach in the heart of a man than a thousand lashes.”

קָרָא שְׁמוֹ לֹא עַמִּי, כִּי אַתֶּם לֹא עַמִּי וְאַנֹכִי לֹא אֱהְיֶה לָכֶם.



Which they used for Baal.  
 Therefore will I take back My corn  
     in its harvest time,  
 And My wine in its season,  
 And I will reclaim My wool and  
     My flax  
 Given to cover her nakedness.  
 Now I will uncover her shame in  
     the sight of her lovers  
 And none shall save her out of My  
     hand.  
 I will lay waste her vines and her  
     fig-trees  
 Which she said, "They are mine,  
 My lovers have given them to me."  
 I will turn them into a forest,  
 And beasts of the field shall devour  
     them.  
 I will bring all her joy to an end,  
 Her feasts, her new moons and her  
     sabbaths,  
 And all her festivals.  
 I will punish her for her days of the  
     Baalim,  
 To whom she offered sacrifices,  
 And decked herself with earrings  
     and jewels

And went after her lovers,  
 And forgot Me, said the Lord.

## HOSEA TAKES HIS WIFE BACK

AGAIN the Lord said to me: "Go and love the woman beloved of a paramour, who is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love their raisin cakes." [9]

So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley. And I said to her: "For many days you shall live a secluded life. You shall not be any man's wife, nor will I myself come near you. [10] For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, without a prince, without sacrifices, without a sacred pillar, ephod or teraphim."

## THE SINS OF ISRAEL

HEAR THE WORDS of the Lord, you children of Israel. The Lord has a quarrel with the inhabitants of the land, because

☞ [9] RAISIN CAKES: *These were part of the pagan offerings to Baal.*

☞ [10] I MYSELF COME NEAR YOU: *God commands Hosea to give his erring wife another chance, just as the Lord has given the children of Israel another chance after their betrayal. But first there must be a period of seclusion.*

כִּי יָמִים רַבִּים יֵשְׁבוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵין מֶלֶךְ וְאֵין שָׂר וְאֵין זָבַח וְאֵין מִצֵּבָה וְאֵין  
 אֶפֹּד וְתִרְפִּים.

there is no truth, nor kindness, nor knowledge of God in the land. Cursing and lying, stealing and killing; they break all bounds and blood touches blood. [11] My people inquire of a block of wood to guide them, and their staff instructs them. A whoring spirit caused them to err and they have abandoned their God.

There is no man to bring charges, no one to reprove; [12] the people reproach the priest. Therefore the land mourns and everything that dwells therein languishes; even the beasts of the earth, the birds in the air and the fish in the sea perish.

I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; when you yourselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with temple-prostitutes; [13] and a people that is without understanding must come to ruin.

#### GUILT AND PUNISHMENT

Blow the shofar in Gibeah,  
And the trumpet in Ramah;  
Sound the alarm in Beth-aven: [14]  
"Look behind you, O Benjamin!"  
Ephraim shall be desolate in the day  
of punishment;

❧ [11] BLOOD TOUCHES BLOOD: *Everywhere there is violence and murder.*

❧ [12] NO ONE TO REPROVE: Our Sages say that when the scholar, rabbi or leader sees evils done and does not point them out to the people and reprove them, he shares the punishment.

Abba Saul ben Nannas said: There are four types of scholars. One is the man who learns, but does not teach others. The second is the man who teaches others but does not learn. The third is he who neither learns nor teaches. And there is the man who both teaches and learns.

❧ [13] TEMPLE PROSTITUTES: If parents commit transgressions, the example they set will be copied by their children.

❧ [14] BETH-AVEN: *The prophet derisively calls Beth-el, which means the house of God, Beth-aven, which means the house of sin, because Jeroboam had set up a golden calf to be worshiped there.*

עָמִי בְּעֵצוֹ יִשְׁאָל, וּמִקְלוֹ יִגִּיד לוֹ.

Among the tribes of Israel do I make  
known that which will surely  
occur.

The princes of Judah are like those  
who remove the landmark;

I will pour out My wrath upon  
them like water.

Ephraim is oppressed, justly  
crushed;

Because he willingly walked after  
filth.

Therefore I am to Ephraim like a  
moth,

To the house of Judah like a  
rottenness.

When Ephraim saw his sickness,  
And Judah his wound,

Ephraim went to Assyria

And sent to the great king.

But he is not able to heal you,

Neither can he cure your wound.

For I will be to Ephraim like a lion,

And like a young lion to the house  
of Judah.

I will tear and depart,

I will take away, and there shall be  
none to rescue.

#### FEIGNED REPENTANCE

I WILL GO and return to My place until  
they acknowledge their guilt and seek  
My face. [15] In their distress they will  
seek me earnestly.

[They will say,] “Come, let us return  
to the Lord, for He has torn but will heal  
us. He has wounded us, but He will bind  
us up, that we may live in His presence.  
Let us know Him, let us strive to know  
the Lord. His coming is sure as the com-  
ing of dawn. He shall be to us as the rain,  
as the spring rain that waters the  
earth.” [16]

☞ [15] SEEK MY FACE: When Israel sinned, the Temple was deprived of the presence of God until the people should repent. The Lord withdrew His presence so that the enemy might enter the Temple. But once the children of Israel acknowledged their guilt and sought Him in earnest, He would return.

☞ [16] THAT WATERS THE EARTH: A pious father visited his older daughter who was married to a potter. Before he left her house, his daughter said, “Father, please pray for dry, sunny weather so that my husband’s pots will dry well. Because you are pious, the Lord will answer you.”

לְכוּ וְנִשְׁוֹבָה אֵלַי כִּי הוּא טָרַף וִירְפָאנוּ, יְהִי וְיִחַבְּשֵׁנוּ.

O Ephraim, what shall I do with you?  
O Israel, what shall I do with you? Your  
goodness is like the morning cloud, like  
the dew that passes away early. I desire  
goodness and not sacrifices, and the  
knowledge of God rather than burnt  
offerings. [17] But like Adam they have  
transgressed the covenant. They have  
dealt treacherously against Me. Gilead is  
a city of evildoers, tracked with bloody  
footprints. The priests hide themselves

on the road and murder those going to  
Shechem. In the house of Beth-el I have  
seen horrible things; harlotry is found in  
Ephraim, Israel is defiled. [18]

#### KINGS AND PRINCES FALLEN

WHEN I WOULD RESTORE the fortunes of  
My people; when I would heal Israel,  
then the iniquity of Ephraim and the  
wickedness of Samaria is uncovered.

The next day the father visited his younger daughter who was the wife of a farmer, and she asked him to pray for rain. "We need rain badly for the crops, for the corn and the wheat to grow."

The father raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, "O Lord, blessed be Thy Name. In Your compassion, I leave it to You to know when to send rain and when sunshine, to arrange the blessings of the world so that none are hurt and all are satisfied."

☞ [17] BURNT OFFERINGS: When Johanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua passed the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem, Rabbi Joshua lamented, "Woe unto us. The Temple where we made offerings to atone for our sins is destroyed. How shall we atone for our sins now?"

"We have other means of atonement," Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai replied. "Benevolence to our fellowmen. Charity. Loans without interest to the poor. And other deeds of lovingkindness. For it is written: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'"

☞ [18] ISRAEL IS DEFILED: *No place, not the Temple or Gilead or Shechem or Beth-el are intrinsically holy. Holiness and sacredness depend on men's deeds. When the spirit of God departs from a place it is defiled; when the Lord's presence is removed from the Temple, it can be destroyed by the pagans.*

כִּי חֶסֶד חָפַצְתִּי וְלֹא זָבַח, וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מַעֲוִלוֹת.

They commit falsehood, the thief enters into the house, the robbers roam the streets, no one says even in his heart that I remember all their wickedness. Now their sins have encompassed them and they are before My sight. They make the king glad with their wickedness and their princes with their lies. [19] On the day of coronation the princes make him sick with the heat of the wine and the king revels with worthless men. For they have made ready their heart like an oven, in the morning it burns like a flaming fire. They are all as heated as an oven and devour their rulers. All their kings are fallen and there is none that calls to Me.

#### WORTHLESS FOREIGN ENTANGLEMENTS

Ephraim mingles among the nations;

Ephraim has become a cake not turned.

Strangers have devoured his strength,

And he is not aware of it.

Yes, gray hairs are sprinkled upon him,

And he knows it not.

The arrogance of Israel testifies against him;

Still they have not returned to the Lord their God,

Nor sought Him in spite of all this.

Ephraim has become like a silly dove, without understanding. [20]

They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.

Even as they go, I will spread My net over them.

☞ [19] WITH THEIR LIES: Four types of people are unworthy of receiving the presence of God: scoffers, flatterers, liars and slanderers.

☞ [20] WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING: The Roman Emperor Hadrian installed three garrisons in Israel, and sent his couriers to announce that any Jews who came out of hiding and presented themselves to the Emperor would be granted their wishes about where they would live. Many of the Jews believed those announcements, so "Ephraim became like a silly dove, without understanding," and came out of hiding. All gathered in the valley of Remmon. There, Hadrian said to the commander of his legions: "By the time I finish eating this loaf of bread and capon's drumstick, I do not want to see a single Jew alive." The Roman soldiers surrounded the refugees and slaughtered them.

וַיְהִי אֶפְרַיִם כִּיּוֹנָה פוֹתָה אֵין לֵב, מִצָּרִים קָרְאוּ, אֲשׁוּר הִלְכוּ.

I will bring them down as the fowls  
from heaven.  
I will bind them because of their  
wickedness,  
I will chastise them as their congreg-  
ation has heard before.  
Woe to them, for they have strayed  
from Me!  
Destruction will overtake them, for  
they have transgressed against  
Me!  
How can I redeem them,  
When they speak lies to Me?  
They did not cry to Me with their  
heart;  
Though they wail upon their beds,  
They bestir themselves for corn and  
wine, they rebel against Me.  
Though I have trained and strength-  
ened their arms,  
Yet they devise wickedness against  
Me.

## FALSE GODS

Put a *shofar* to your lips!  
A vulture swoops upon the house  
of the Lord,  
Because they have broken My  
covenant

And sinned against the law.  
Israel cast off that which is good;  
[Therefore] an enemy shall pursue  
him.  
They have set up kings, but not with  
My consent;  
They deposed them, but not with  
My approval.  
Because they sowed the wind, they  
shall reap the whirlwind;  
There will be no stalks, the sprout  
shall yield no meal;  
If it should yield fruit, foreigners  
shall devour it.  
Israel is swallowed up;  
Now they are become among the  
nations  
A worthless vessel.  
Ephraim had enough altars to sin,  
But it has multiplied altars to sin  
more.  
As for the burnt offerings that they  
sacrifice to Me,  
Let them eat the flesh,  
For the Lord does not desire them.  
Israel has forgotten its Maker and  
built palaces, [21]  
And Judah has multiplied fortified  
cities.

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🕎 [21] FORGOTTEN ITS MAKER AND BUILT PALACES: After Rabbi Abum had built two large gates before the great synagogue, he showed them proudly to Rabbi Mana. Rabbi Mana then quoted Hosea's verse and asked if there were no poor scholars to support instead.

כִּי רוּחַ יִזְרְעוּ וְסוּפָתָהּ יִקְצְרוּ, קָמָה אֵין לוֹ צֶמַח בְּלִי יַעֲשֶׂה קֶמַח.

But I will send a fire upon the cities,  
And it shall devour their palaces.

#### THE HORROR OF EXILE

EPHRAIM surrounded Me with lies and the house of Israel with deceit. Ephraim herds the wind and hunts the east wind; he multiplies lies and destruction all the time. They make a covenant with Assyria and carry oil to Egypt. The Lord has a quarrel with Israel and will punish Jacob according to his deeds.

They shall not dwell in the Lord's land. Ephraim shall return to Egypt and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food. They shall not pour wine offerings to the Lord nor prepare His sacrifices. Their bread shall be mourner's bread; all who eat of it shall defile themselves because the food for their eating shall not come into the house of the Lord.

And what will you do on the festival day, on the day of the feast of the Lord?

#### ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS

IN THE WOMB he seized his brother's heel and in his full vigor he strove with a

godlike being. He fought with the angel and prevailed. He wept and entreated him for mercy. At Beth-el he would find him and there he would talk to him. Then Jacob fled to the field of Aram, Israel served for a wife, for a wife he guarded sheep. By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt and by a prophet Israel was guarded.

Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel. [22] Like the first fruit of a fig tree I saw your fathers. But as soon as they came to Baal-peor, they separated themselves [from Me and clung] to that shameful thing, and they became an abomination like that which they loved. But I am the Lord, your God [who brought you up] from the land of Egypt, and you know no God but Me. There is no savior but Me. I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. But when they were fed and they filled themselves, they became arrogant and forgot me.

When Israel was a child I came to love him, and out of Egypt I called him to be My son. But the more I called them, the further they went away from Me. They sacrificed to the Baalim and made offer-

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🌀 [22] I FOUND ISRAEL: When the children of Israel received the Law at Mount Sinai, the Lord found them like grapes in the desert, a refreshment and delight, a joy to the world.

כַּעֲנָבִים בַּמִּדְבָּר מָצָאתִי יִשְׂרָאֵל, כְּכֹפֹרָה בְּתֹאנָה בְּרֹאשִׁיתָהּ רָאִיתִי  
אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם.

ings to graven images. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms, and I bent down and fed them gently. But from the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, Israel. There they stand [in their defiance] now. Will the war against the sons of iniquity [23] not overtake them?

Where is your king now, that he may save you in all your cities, and where are your princes, of whom you said: Give me a king and princes. I gave you a king in My anger and took him away in My wrath.

#### REAP AS YOU PLOW

SOW RIGHTEOUSNESS for yourselves, reap the fruit of mercy. [24] Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness upon you. But you have plowed

wickedness and reaped iniquity, you have eaten the fruit of lies; you have trusted in your chariots and in the multitude of your mighty men. Therefore shall confusion arise among your people; all your fortresses shall be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle; the mother was dashed in pieces with the children. Beth-el has done all this to you because of your great wickedness. At daybreak the king of Israel was utterly destroyed.

#### GOD'S COMFORT

How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I surrender you, Israel?  
How can I treat you like Admah?  
How can I make you like Zeboim?  
My heart turns within Me,  
My compassion is kindled within Me.

☞ [23] THE SONS OF INIQUITY: A father had a son whom he bathed and anointed, gave plenty to eat and drink, and dressed in rich garments. He then put a purse of gold around his neck and set him down before a house of ill-repute. How, then, could the son help but sin?

☞ [24] THE FRUIT OF MERCY: "Benevolence (*gemilat hesed*) and kindness are greater and more important than charity," Rabbi Eleazar said. "If a man sows, it is doubtful whether he will enjoy the harvest or not. But when a man reaps he will surely eat. So the rewards of charity depend entirely upon the kindness of it."

אֵיךְ אֶתְּנֶךָ אֶפְרַיִם, אֲמַנְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל?



I will not carry out My fierce anger.  
I will not return to destroy Eph-  
raim;  
For I am God and not man,  
The Holy One in the midst of you,  
And I will not come in fury.

#### THE PLEA AND THE PROMISE

RETURN, O ISRAEL, [25] to the Lord your God, for in your iniquity you have stumbled. Prepare yourselves with words and return to the Lord. Say to Him: "For-  
give all iniquities, count only the good and instead of oxen we will render offer-  
ings with our lips. [26] Assyria shall not save us, nor will we ride on horses, nei-  
ther will we call any more the work of our hands our gods. For in You the fatherless find mercy."

I will heal their rebellion, I shall love them as a gift, for My anger shall be turned away from them. I will be as dew to Israel. He shall blossom as the lily [27] and strike his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be like an olive-tree and his fra-  
grance like Lebanon. Again there will be dwellers in His shadow who will make corn to grow and shall blossom as the vine; and he will be known as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim [shall say]: "What have I to do with idols?" As for Me, I respond to him and watch over him. I am like a leafy cypress-tree; from Me your fruit is found.

Now I will hedge up her way with thorns and I will put a fence about her that she shall not find her path. She will run after her lovers, but she shall not

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- ☞ [25] RETURN, O ISRAEL: "Return to Me," says the Lord, "and I will re-  
turn to you" (Malachi 3:7). When a man goes out to seek God, he  
meets the Lord who has gone out to meet him halfway.
- ☞ [26] OFFERINGS WITH OUR LIPS: If penitence is motivated by the love of  
God, then it is complete; no trace of taint remains. But if it is motivated  
by the fear of punishment alone, a taint remains.
- ☞ [27] BLOSSOM AS THE LILY: Hosea was one of the harshest of the Lord's  
prophets. In his anger, he said at the beginning, "O Lord, give them  
whatsoever You will give; give them a miscarrying womb and a dry  
breast" (9:14). But at the last he was able to prophesy, "They will  
blossom like a lily."

שׁוֹבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיהָ, כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בַּעֲוֹנֶיהָ.

overtake them; she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say: "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now."

Now I shall entice her and lead her into the wilderness and speak to her heart, and I will give her back her vineyards, and the waste valley will I turn into the door of hope. And she shall respond there as in the days when she came up out of the land of Egypt. That day shall you call Me: "My husband," and shall no longer call Me: "My Baal." For I shall take away the names of the Baalim from her mouth and they shall never again be mentioned.

On that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven and the creeping things on the ground. I will break the bow and the sword and I will abolish war from the land and let you lie down safely. I will betroth you to Me forever, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, and in lovingkindness and in compassion. I will betroth you to Me

in faithfulness and you shall know that I am the Lord.

On that day, said the Lord, I will respond [to the petition] of the heavens and they shall respond to the earth; and the earth shall respond to the corn and the wine and the oil; and they shall respond to Israel. I will increase her to Me in the land and I will have compassion on her that has no compassion, and I will say to them that were not My people, "You are My people," and she will say, "You are My God."

#### THE INGATHERING OF EXILES

AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS that, instead of that which was said to them, "You are not My people," it shall be said to them, "You are the children of the living God." And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together and they shall appoint themselves one head and shall go up out of the land. For great shall be the day of their ingathering. [28]

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✎ [28] THE DAY OF THEIR INGATHERING: "The ingathering of the exiles," Rabbi Johanan said, "is as important as the day when heaven and earth were created."

וְהָיָה, בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר לָהֶם לֹא עַמִּי אַתֶּם, יֹאמַר לָהֶם בְּנֵי אֵל חַי.



## 15. JOEL [I-4]

### THE LOCUST PLAGUE

THE WORD OF THE LORD that came to  
Joel, [I] the son of Pethuel.

Hear this, you old men,  
And give ear all who dwell in the  
land:  
Has the like of this happened in your  
days,

Or in the days of your fathers?

Tell it to your children,

And let your children tell their  
children,

And their children the following  
generations.

That which the shearer left, the  
swarmer has eaten;

That which the swarmer has left,  
the lapper has eaten;

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[I] JOEL: *The name means "The Lord is God." It is the same name as  
Elijah, but with the two halves of the name reversed.*

עֲלֵיהֶם לְבִנֵּיהֶם סִפְרוּ, וּבִנֵּיהֶם לְבִנֵּיהֶם לְדוֹר אַחֵר.

That which the lapper has left, the  
finisher has eaten. [2]  
A nation has invaded my land,  
Mighty and without number;  
His teeth are the teeth of a lion,  
And his jaw-teeth those of a lioness.  
He has turned my vine to waste,  
And splintered my fig trees,  
He has stripped them clean and  
thrown down the shreds,  
And made the branches gleam white.  
The field is devastated,  
The earth mourns;  
For the corn is laid waste,  
The new wine is dried up,  
And the oil has failed.  
Be abashed, you farmers,  
Lament, you vinedressers,  
For the wheat and the barley,  
And the harvest of the field have  
perished.  
The vine is withered,  
The fig-tree wilts;  
The pomegranate-tree, the palm-  
tree also, and the apple-tree,  
All the trees of the field are wither-  
ed;  
And joy has fled from the sons of  
men.

#### THE INVASION

BLOW THE SHOFAR in Zion, sound the  
alarm in the holy mountain; let all the  
inhabitants of the land tremble; for the  
day of the Lord comes, it is near. A day  
of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds  
and thick darkness, as blackness spread  
on the mountains; a great and mighty  
people, the like of them has never been  
seen, neither shall be seen again after  
them, throughout the years of genera-  
tions upon generations. Before them a  
fire devours and behind them a flame  
blazes. The land before them was a gar-  
den of Eden, behind them a desolate  
wilderness; nothing escapes them.

They look like horses, and like war-  
horses they run. They sound like the  
clatter of chariots as they leap on the top  
of the mountains, like the crackling of a  
flame that eats up the stubble. They are  
like mighty people arrayed in battle. In  
their presence nations are anguished, all  
faces darken. They run like mighty men;  
they climb the wall like men of war.  
Every one moves in his own way and  
their paths are not entangled. They break  
through the weapons and are not held

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🌀 [2] THE FINISHER HAS EATEN: *Four kinds of locust have made a wasteland of what was once a fertile country.*

לִפְנֵי אֲכָלָהּ אֵשׁ וְאַחֲרָיו תִּלְהֹט לְהָבָה, כִּגְן-עֵדֶן הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי וְאַחֲרָיו מִדְּבַר  
שְׁמָמָה.

back. They rush upon the city, they run upon the wall, they climb into the houses; through the windows, they enter like a thief.

#### CALL FOR REPENTANCE

YET, EVEN NOW, said the Lord, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and lamentation. Rend your heart and not your garment. [3] Turn to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and abundant in mercy. Who knows but what He will again relent and leave a blessing behind Him, a meal offering and a libation to the Lord your God?

#### THE LORD'S BLESSING

THEN THE LORD became solicitous for His land and had pity on His people. And the Lord answered and said to His people: I will send you corn, wine and oil, and you shall be satisfied therewith; and I will no longer make you a reproach among nations; and the northern one I will remove from you. [4] I will drive him into a barren and desolate land, and his face toward the eastern sea and his hind parts toward the western sea till he rots and the stench of him rises.

I will restore to you the years that the locust has devoured. [5] And you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and you

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- ☞ [3] NOT YOUR GARMENT: Scripture does not say that the people of Nineveh were saved by sackcloth and fasting, but that God saw their deeds, that they had turned away from their evil ways. So, in Joel, it is said, "And rend your hearts not your garments," because neither sackcloth nor fasting will help, only penitence and good deeds.
  - ☞ [4] I WILL REMOVE FROM YOU: The "northern" or "hidden one," the Rabbis say, refers to the evil inclination embedded in the hearts of men. When the Messiah comes, the Lord will isolate the evil propensity in a desolate and barren place so that it can no longer tempt or prompt men.
  - ☞ [5] THE LOCUST HAS DEVoured: As did all the prophets, Joel begins his prophecy with words of rebuke and ends it with words of comfort: "I will restore to you the years that the locust has devoured."

וְקָרְעוּ לְבָבָם וְאֵל בְּגָדֵיהֶם, וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיהֶם.

shall praise the name of the Lord your God. My people shall nevermore be put to shame. [6] And you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and I am the Lord your God, and there is none else.

And it shall come to pass afterward,  
That I will pour My spirit on all  
flesh; [7]

And your sons and your daughters  
shall prophesy.

Your old men shall dream dreams,  
And your young men shall see  
visions.

And also upon male-slaves and  
female-slaves

Will I pour out My spirit.

In those days I will show wonders  
in the heaven and on earth.

Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.  
The sun shall be turned into dark-  
ness,

And the moon into blood,  
Before the great and terrible day of  
the Lord comes.

But whosoever shall call on the  
name of the Lord shall be de-  
livered.

For in Mount Zion in Jerusalem  
there shall be those that escape,

As the Lord has promised;

And among the remnant those  
whom the Lord shall call.

☞ [6] BE PUT TO SHAME: Once, when Rabbi Simeon ben Halafta took leave of a colleague, the colleague sent his son along for Rabbi Simeon's blessing. And Rabbi Simeon blessed the youth, saying, "May it be heaven's pleasure that you never be put to shame nor be ashamed yourself." The young man returned to his father and told him that what Rabbi Simeon had said was unimportant, and then repeated his words. Then the father told his son that he was twice blessed. "Rabbi Simeon blessed you with the same blessing with which the Holy One, blessed be He, blessed Israel twice over."

☞ [7] MY SPIRIT ON ALL FLESH: At the end of days the Lord will pour out His Divine Presence on all humanity. Before then, only chosen individuals were prophets; but in the time of the Messiah all men will be prophets, living at peace and studying the Law. In that day all mysteries will be revealed and all men will have the knowledge of God, each according to his human capacity.

כִּי בְהֶרֶץ צִיּוֹן וּבִירוּשָׁלַיִם תִּהְיֶה פְּלִיטָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר יי'.

## JUDGMENT DAY

IN THOSE DAYS and in that time, when I shall bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat; [8] and I will enter into judgment with them there, because of My people and for My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and divided My land. They have cast lots over My people and have given

a boy for a harlot and sold a girl for a drink of wine.

Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate war! Stir up the mighty men; let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. [9] Let the weak say: "I am strong!" For the nations shall be stirred up and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and there I will sit [10] to judge all the nations from every quarter.

☞ [8] THE VALLEY OF JEHOSHAPHAT: *This means "Valley of God the Judge," and it is here that Joel sees his vision of Judgment Day.*

☞ [9] PRUNING HOOKS INTO SPEARS: There is a time when it is necessary to do battle, to beat plowshares into swords and pruning hooks into spears. Such a time was that of Antiochus who ordered the end of Jewish religious practices on the pain of death. Pious Jews fled to the desert or hid in mountain caves, but none resisted, so that the tyrant ruled until Mattathias and his sons resorted to arms and freed Judea from tyranny.

☞ [10] THERE I WILL SIT: In the time of Hadrian, when the persecution of Jews was severe, two disciples of Rabbi Joshua who were disguised in pagan clothes were discovered by a Roman officer learned in Jewish law. "Are you not required by Jewish law to sanctify the name of your God by readiness to die for your faith? Since you are alive, you must not be believers, and if you don't believe, why not convert?"

The two answered together, "It is unnatural for men to commit suicide."

The Roman officer then said: "If you interpret these two verses

וְנִשְׁפָּטְתִּי עַמָּם שָׁם עַל עַמִּי וְנִחַלְתִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר פָּזְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם וְאֶת אֶרֶצִּי חִלְקוּ.

Multitudes, in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon have grown dark and the stars have withdrawn their splendor. [11] The Lord shall roar from Zion and from Jerusalem He will thunder, and heaven and earth shall quake. But the Lord will be a refuge to His people and a stronghold for the children of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain. Then shall Jerusalem be holy and there shall be no invaders to pass through her any more.

And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk; and all the riverbeds of Judah shall flow with water. A spring shall come forth of the house of the Lord and shall water the valley of Shittim. Egypt shall be a desolation and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Israel, and because they have shed innocent blood in their land. I will avenge the innocent blood. But Judah shall be forever inhabited and Jerusalem for generations to come. For the Lord dwells in Zion.

correctly, I'll let you go. If you don't, I'll kill you." One verse (Isaiah 3 : 13) says, 'The Lord stands to judge the people'; the other (Joel 4 : 12) declares, 'For there will I sit to judge all the nations round about.' Why does the Lord stand in Isaiah and sit in Joel?"

The disciples of Rabbi Joshua answered tauntingly, "When the Lord judges our people, He stands, judging us briefly and with compassion. But when He judges you pagans, He sits so that He can minutely and at His leisure examine all your transgressions."

❧ [11] WITHDRAWN THEIR SPLENDOR: The Roman philosophers asked the Sages, "If your God has such aversion to idolatry, why doesn't He destroy all idols?"

The Rabbis replied: "People worship sun, moon and stars, and other useful things. Should the Lord destroy the universe because of the ignorance of fools?" And they said again, "Suppose that a man stole a measure of wheat and then sowed it. Should the wheat not grow?"

וַיְהוּדָה לְעוֹלָם תָּשֵׁב, וִירוּשָׁלַיִם לְדוֹר וָדוֹר, וַיֵּי שׁוֹכֵן בְּצִיּוֹן.





## 16. AMOS [1-9]

THE WORDS OF AMOS [1] who was among  
the shepherds [2] of Tekoa [3] and his

visions concerning Israel. [He prophe-  
sied] in the days of Uzziah king of Judah,

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[1] THE WORDS OF AMOS: The three prophets—Amos, Jeremiah and Koheleth—whose words were chiefly rebuke and reproach have their prophecies attributed not to the Lord but to themselves.

In Hebrew the word amos means heavy or burdened. The people of his generation jeered saying, “Of all God’s creatures, the Almighty has rested His holy inspiration on that crippled tongue.”

[2] SHEPHERDS: Amos herded sheep and goats and was a dresser of sycamore trees. This was a very humble occupation in which each sycamore fig was punctured while still on the tree so that its bitterness would escape and the fig would be palatable when ripened. Sycamore figs were then ground into flour for the coarse bread of the poor.

[3] TEKOA: *A village south of Jerusalem on the edge of the Judean desert.*

לָמָּה נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ עָמוֹס? – שֶׁהָיָה עָמוֹס בְּלִשְׁוֹנוֹ.

and of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

#### THE MOTTO

HE SAID : The Lord roars from Zion and raises His voice from Jerusalem ; the pastures of the shepherds mourn and the top of Carmel withers.

For the three transgressions of Damascus [4] and for the fourth I will not forgive them, because they have threshed Gilead with threshes of iron. So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad. I will break the defenses of Damascus and cut off the inhabitants from the valley of the idols [5] and the holder of the scepter

from Beth-eden and the people of Aram shall go into captivity, said the Lord.

Thus said the Lord: For the three transgressions of Gaza [6] and for the fourth I will not forgive them, because they carried away into exile the whole people, to sell them as slaves to Edom. And I shall send a fire on the wall of Gaza which shall devour its palaces. And I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and the holder of the scepter of Ashkelon, so I will turn My hand against Ekron that the remnant of the Philistines shall perish.

Thus said the Lord: For the three transgressions of Tyre [7] and the fourth I will not forgive them, because they handed over a whole people as captives to Edom, and remembered not the covenant of brotherhood. I will send a fire

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☞ [4] DAMASCUS: *The capital city of Syria, long the enemy of Israel. Hazael and his son Ben-hadad were its rulers.*

☞ [5] THE VALLEY OF THE IDOLS: *The Hebrew is bikath-aven, the valley of vanity, where the Syrians worshiped the sun.*

☞ [6] GAZA: *Capital city of the Philistines.*

☞ [7] TYRE: *Capital city of Phoenicia.*

יִי מִצִּיּוֹן יִשְׁאַג וּמִירוּשָׁלַם יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ, וְאַבְלוּ נְאוֹת הָרוּעִים וַיִּבֶשׂ רֹאשׁ הַכַּרְמֶל.

on the wall of Tyre which shall devour it.

Thus said the Lord: For the three transgressions of Edom [8] and for the fourth I will not forgive them, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity and kept his rage forever. Therefore will I send a fire upon Teman and it shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.

Thus said the Lord: For the three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for the fourth I will not forgive them, for they have ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead that they might enlarge their borders. So I will set fire to the wall of Rabbah and it shall devour her palaces with shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest on the day of the whirlwind, and the king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together.

Thus said the Lord: For the three transgressions of Moab and the fourth I will not forgive him, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom for lime.

So will I send a fire upon Moab and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth. [9] Moab shall die with tumult, amidst the shouting and the blare of trumpets. I will cut off her king from the midst of her and all her princes will I slay with him.

#### ISRAEL'S TRANSGRESSIONS

THUS SAID THE LORD: For the three transgressions of Israel and for the fourth I will not forgive them, because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. They trample down the poor like dust, and make the humble turn aside from the way; and a man and his father go to the same maid to profane My holy name. They stretch themselves beside every altar, on garments seized in pledge, and the wine of those who have been fined they drink in the house of their God.

It was I who brought you out of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorites.

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☞ [8] EDOM: *Capital of the Edomites.*

☞ [9] KERIOTH: *One of the major cities of Moab where the Moabite god was worshiped.*

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אֲשִׁיבֵנּוּ – עַל מִכְרָם בַּכֶּסֶף צַדִּיק  
וְאֶבְיוֹן בַּעֲבוּר נַעֲלִים.

And it was I who destroyed the Amorite before you, whose height was like the height of cedars, and he was strong as the oaks. Yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below.

I raised up some of your sons [for] prophets and some of your young men for Nazirites. [10] But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy. Is it not so, O children of Israel? Therefore I will

make you groan in your places as the cart filled with sheaves makes the threshing floor groan. Flight shall fail the swift, strength shall not encourage the strong; and the warrior shall not save himself. He who holds the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself; neither shall he who rides the horse save himself. The most courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked on that day, said the Lord.

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ס [10] NAZIRITES: *Nazirites were men consecrated to God for a definite time during which they strove to break a bad habit or improve their ways. A glutton or a drunkard might vow to abstain for a given period, or for his whole life. Yet even in such matters our Sages opposed the making of vows; man should abstain from things harmful to him without a vow.*

“Whoever takes a vow,” the Rabbis said, “it is as if he had built a high place for idols; and he who fulfills his vow, it is as if he had sacrificed thereon.”

Judaism believes a man is made to enjoy the legitimate pleasures of the world, and asceticism is to be avoided. “A man is destined to give an account of all that his eye sees, and to taste all that his mouth might taste.” Rabbi Lazar, concerned about this injunction, saved pennies to buy all kinds of fruit that ripen in different seasons, making the blessing *shehecheyanu* and giving thanks to God for all the good things that He had created in the world.

Rabbi Abaye said: Simeon the Just, Rabbi Simeon and Rabbi Eleazar ha-Kappar all agree that a Nazirite is a sinner, because it is taught, ‘And he shall make atonement for him, for that he sinned against a soul’ (Numbers 6:11). Against what soul did the Nazirite sin? His own, because he afflicted himself by refraining from everything. Hence, he who fasts is called a sinner.

וְאֶבֶד מְנוּס מִקָּל, וְחָזַק לֹא יֵאֱמָץ כָּחוֹ, וְגִבּוֹר לֹא יִמָּלֵט נַפְשׁוֹ.

## ISRAEL THE CHOSEN

HEAR THIS WORD that the Lord has spoken against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt. Are you not to Me like the Ethiopians, O children of Israel? said the Lord. I have brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, but did not I bring up the Philistines out of Caphtor and Aram from Kir? But only you alone have I known [11] of all the families of the earth. Therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.

Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon this sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, said the Lord. For I will give a

command and I will sift the house of Israel which is scattered among all the nations, as one sifts corn in a sieve. Not the least grain shall fall upon the earth. All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, those that say: Disaster shall not overtake us [12] nor confront us.

## NOTHING BY CHANCE

Will two walk together unless they  
met in a place?

Will a lion roar in the forest

When it has no prey?

Will a young lion raise his voice out  
of his lair

Unless he has seized something?

Will a bird fall in a snare

If there is no hunter?

☞ [11] YOU ALONE HAVE I KNOWN: *The children of Israel are chosen by God not for special privilege, nor to rule over others. They are chosen to carry a special yoke, the yoke of the commandments. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe," the festival Kiddush says, "who has chosen us among all peoples and singled us out among all the nations by sanctifying us with Thy commandments."*

☞ [12] DISASTER SHALL NOT OVERTAKE US: No man shall say that I am only me, an insignificant one among many; so no matter how evil the thing I do, it will not cause a calamity. The prophet says, "They shall die by the sword, all those who say that evil shall not come because of our doing."

הֲיִלְכוּ שְׁנַיִם יַחְדָּו, בְּלֹתִי אִם נִוָּעְדוּ?

Will a snare spring up from the  
ground  
And have caught nothing at all?  
If a shofar be sounded in the city,  
Shall the people not tremble?  
If disaster befalls a city,  
Has not the Lord caused it?  
But the Lord God will do nothing  
Unless He reveals His purpose to  
His servants the prophets. [13]  
The lion has roared,  
Who will not fear?  
The Lord God has spoken,  
Who can but prophesy?  
Proclaim over the palaces of Assyria,  
And over the palaces in the land of  
Egypt,  
And say: Assemble yourselves upon

the mountains of Samaria,  
And see the great confusion and op-  
pression within her.  
They know not to do the right, says  
the Lord.  
They store up violence and robbery  
in their palaces.  
Therefore, thus said the Lord God:  
An enemy shall surround the  
land,  
And he shall strip the strength from  
you,  
And your palaces shall be plundered.  
I will smite the winter-house with  
the summer-house;  
And the houses of ivory shall perish,  
And the great houses shall come to  
an end.

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🔔 [13] HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS: Rabbi Simeon says that this refers to the time when there were prophets. But when they were no more, the Sages took their place and in one sense even excelled the prophets, for the Holy Spirit had visited the prophets only intermittently, but it rested steadily on the wise.

A voice from heaven once promised the Gaon of Vilna that he was worthy of having Elijah the Prophet come to him to explain the difficult passages and mysteries in the Torah and the Talmud. But the Vilna Gaon would not have it. "I want no knowledge given me as a gift," he said. "I want to earn it by my own labor."

אַרְיֵה שָׂאג, מִי לֹא יִירָא? אֲדֹנֵי אֱלֹהִים דְּבָר – מִי לֹא יִנְבֵּא?

## DIRGE FOR ISRAEL

HEAR YOU the words of lamentation that  
I take up against you, O house of Israel:

The virgin of Israel has fallen,  
Never to rise again;  
Cast down upon her own land,  
There is none to raise her up.

For thus said the Lord God: the city  
that sent forth a thousand shall have a  
hundred left; and the city that sent  
forth a hundred shall have ten left.

You turn justice to wormwood and  
cast down righteousness to the earth.  
They hate him who reproves in the gate  
and they abhor him that speaks up-  
rightly. I know your transgressions, how  
many and mighty are your sins. You  
oppress the just, you take bribes and turn  
aside the needy who come to seek jus-  
tice.

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion  
and are confident in the mountain of  
Samaria, the notable men of the nation  
to whom the house of Israel come. You  
think that the evil day is far off and you  
cause the seat of violence to come near.  
They lie upon beds of ivory and stretch  
themselves upon couches. They eat fat  
lambs out of the flock and the calves

from the midst of the stall. They im-  
provise songs to the sound of the harp  
and consider themselves like David in the  
making of a song.

They drink wine from bowls, anoint  
themselves with the choicest of oils and  
they grieve not over the woe of Joseph.

The Lord God has sworn by Himself:  
I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his  
palaces, and I will deliver up the city  
with all that is in it. For behold, I will  
raise up against you a nation, O house  
of Israel, said the Lord, the God of the  
host, and they shall crush you from the  
entrance of Hamath to the brook of  
Arabah.

## THE KING OF SAMARIA

HEAR THIS WORD, you king of Bashan,  
who are in the mountain of Samaria,  
that oppress the poor, that crush the  
needy, that say to their husbands:  
"Bring, that we may feast." The Lord  
God has sworn by His holiness that days  
shall come upon you, that they will drag  
you with hooks, and the last of you with  
fishhooks, and then you shall be cast into  
the harems.

Therefore, because you trample upon  
the poor and take from him exactions of

הַפּוֹרְטִים עַל פִּי הַנֶּבֶל, כְּדוֹיֵד חֲשָׁבוּ לָהֶם כְּלִי שִׁיר.

wheat, [14] you have built houses of hewn stones and you shall not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but shall not drink their wine.

Therefore, thus said the Lord: In all the squares shall be [heard] lamentations, and a cry of woe shall be heard in all the streets. They shall call all the farmers to mourning and all who know how to wail to lamentation. [15] In the vineyards shall there be lamentation, for I will pass through the midst of you.

Hear this, O you who would swallow the needy and destroy the poor of the land, saying: When will the [day of the] new moon be gone that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, that we may offer corn? Make the measure small and the price great and tamper with the scales. To buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the corn.

The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: I will never forget any of their deeds. Shall not the earth tremble on this account and shall not every inhabitant in it mourn? Yes, the whole of it shall rise like the Nile and heave and sink like that river in Egypt.

And it shall come to pass on that day, says the Lord, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and your songs into dirges. I will put a sackcloth on all loins and baldness on every head. I will make it as the mourning for an only son and its end like a bitter day.

#### THE GREAT FAMINE

BEHOLD, days are coming, said the Lord God, that I will send a famine upon the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst

☞ [14] EXACTIONS OF WHEAT: Rabbi Johanan said that a person who held produce until prices rose, then sold it to the poor, was a speculator and a wrongdoer. Samuel's father sold fruit at the prices prevailing immediately after the harvest, but his son held the fruit. Then when the prices were high, Samuel's son sold his fruit at the earlier, cheaper harvest prices, thus enabling the poor to buy fruit when otherwise the prices would have been beyond their means. Therefore the son's action was better than the father's.

☞ [15] TO LAMENTATION: As it is forbidden to work during a festival, so is it forbidden to work during a time of mourning.

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים, נְאוּם אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהִים, וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ, לֹא רָעָב לֶלֶחֶם...



for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to the east; they shall seek for the word of the Lord and shall not find it. [16] And that day shall the fairest of maidens and the youths faint.

Woe to you who crave the day of the Lord. Wherefore would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light. As if a man were fleeing from a lion and

a bear met him. He entered the house to hide himself and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. [17] Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light? Blackness with no brightness in it?

I hate, I despise your feasts. I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, and the melody of your

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❧ [16] AND SHALL NOT FIND IT: Heaven forbid that the Torah be forgotten in Israel! Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai asked how to interpret the verse "They shall seek the word of the Lord and shall not find it." The answer: They shall find no clear and definitive ruling in any of the places where they seek.

❧ [17] A SERPENT BIT HIM: Ulla said, "Let the Messiah come, but because of the birth pangs preceding his arrival, let me not see him." Rabba said likewise, and also Rabbi Jochanan. But Resh Lakish said, "Why so? This is how it is in the world. When one goes into the field and meets a bailiff who contests his title to the field, it is as if he met a lion. When he enters the town and is accosted by a tax collector, it is as if he met a bear. When he enters his house and finds his sons and daughters in the throes of hunger, it is as if he were bitten by a serpent. So we experience the same succession of troubles even now, without the coming of the Messiah. Why then should we be afraid? Our unwillingness to see the Messiah is because God Himself will then bewail the fate of the Gentiles whom He will have to punish for persecuting His children. But the Almighty will say: "The Gentiles are also My handiwork, as are the children of Israel, so how shall I destroy the former on account of the latter?"

... וְלֹא צָמָא לַמִּיָּם, כִּי אִם לְשִׁמְעַת דְּבָרֵי יְיָ.

lyres: I will not hear them. But let justice well up like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Did you bring to Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? Therefore I will exile you beyond Damascus.

#### FIVE VISIONS: THE LOCUST

THE LORD showed me; Behold He was forming a locust, at the start of the later growing. This was the growing after the king's mowings. As they devoured the grass of the land, I said: "O, Lord God, forgive, I pray You. How can Jacob rise up? He is so small."

The Lord relented concerning this and said: "It shall not be."

#### DESTRUCTION BY FIRE

THUS THE LORD GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord God called down fire to devour. It devoured the great deep and it

began to devour the land. Then I said: "O, Lord God, cease, I pray You. How can Jacob rise up? He is so small!"

The Lord relented of this and said: "This also shall not be."

#### THE WALL AND THE PLUMBLINE

THUS HE SHOWED ME: Behold, God stood upon a wall with a plumbline in His hand. And the Lord said: "What do you see, Amos?" I said: "A plumbline." [18] God said: "I am setting a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel. I will not forgive them. [19] The high places of Isaac shall become desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

#### AMAZIAH THE INFORMER

THEN AMAZIAH, the priest of Beth-el, sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying: "Amos has conspired against you in the

☞ [18] A PLUMBLINE: In Hebrew a plumbline is *onach*, and the word also means to deceive, cheat or wrong someone.

☞ [19] I WILL NOT FORGIVE THEM: Rabbi Hisda said: "All gates are locked except those through which the cries of the wronged echo. As it is written: Behold the Lord stood at the wall of the wronged and in His hand were the wronged. God is always ready to plead the case of one who has been wronged."

וַיִּגַּל כַּמִּים מִשְׁפָּט, וַיִּצְדָּקָה כְּנִחַל אֵיתָן.

midst of the house of Israel. The land cannot endure all his words, for this is what Amos said: 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel shall surely be carried into captivity out of this land.'"

Then Amaziah said to Amos: "Seer, go, flee the land of Judah and earn your bread by prophesying there. But do not prophesy again in Beth-el, for it is the king's sanctuary and the kingdom's house."

Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah: "I am no prophet, neither am I a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman and a trimmer of sycamores. The Lord took me from behind the sheep and said to me: 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.' You tell me I am not to prophesy against Israel and not to preach against the house of Isaac. Now hear the word of the Lord: Your wife shall whore [with the enemy] in the city, your sons and daughters shall fall by sword. Your land shall be divided up, and you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall be driven into captivity out of the land."

#### A BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT

THE LORD showed me a basket of summer fruit. And He said: "What do you see, Amos?" And I said: "A basket of summer fruit."

Then the Lord said to me: "The end comes upon My people Israel. I will not forgive them any longer. [20] The songs of the palace shall become lamentations, said the Lord. There will be many dead bodies and then a hush [will envelop] the whole place."

#### NONE WILL ESCAPE

I SAW THE LORD standing beside the altar, and He said: Smite the capitals [on the columns], that the foundations may shake. Break them in pieces on the heads of all of them. And those who are left I will slay with the sword. None of them shall escape when he flees. Though they dig themselves into the netherworld, from there My hand shall take them. Though they climb up into heaven, I will bring them down. Though they

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🌀 [20] I WILL NOT FORGIVE THEM ANY LONGER: Our Sages taught that if a man repents, do not ask him to recall his former evil deeds. If he is a convert, do not taunt him with remembering the deeds of his ancestors. If he is a proselyte and comes to study Torah, it is forbidden to say to him: "Shall the mouth which ate forbidden food study Torah written from the mouth of the Omnipotent?"

לֹא זָבִיא אֲנֹכִי וְלֹא בֶן זָבִיא אֲנֹכִי, כִּי בֹקֵר אֲנֹכִי וּבֹלֵס שְׂקָמִים.

hide themselves on the top of Carmel, I will search them out and take them down from there. Though they hide themselves from My sight at the bottom of the sea, I will command the serpent and he shall bite them. Though they are driven into captivity before their enemies, there will I command the sword to slay them. I will set My eye upon them for evil and not for good.

#### A CALL TO REPENT

THUS SAID THE LORD to the house of Israel: Seek Me and live. [21] But seek

not Beth-el, go not to Gilgal, and visit not Beer-sheba, for Gilgal shall go into captivity and Beth-el shall come to naught. Seek the Lord and live, lest He set the house of Joseph on fire and it shall devour, and there will be none to quench it in Beth-el. Seek good and not evil, that you may live, and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you as you have implored. Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

On that day I will raise up the fallen tabernacle of David and close up its

❧ [21] SEEK ME AND LIVE: Rabbi Simlai preached that 613 precepts were given to Moses, of which 365 were negative and 248 positive. King David came and reduced them to 11 principles (Psalm 15), as it is written, "Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy mountain? 1. He who walks uprightly, and 2. walks in righteousness, and 3. speaks truth in his heart, 4. who has no slander upon his tongue, 5. nor does evil to his fellow, 6. nor takes up reproach against his neighbor, 7. in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but 8. he honors them that fear the Lord, 9. he swears to his neighbor and does not change, 10. he does not give his money for interest, 11. nor take bribes against the innocent.

The prophet Isaiah came and reduced them to six principles (Isaiah 33:15-16): 1. He who walks righteously, and 2. speaks uprightly; 3. he who despises the gain of oppression; 4. he who shakes his hand

כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְיָ לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל: דְּרֹשׁוּנִי וְחִיּוּ.

breaches, repair its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old. The days come, said the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes the sower of seeds. The mountains shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall melt. I will return the captivity

of My people, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine; make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their own land and they shall never again be plucked up out of their land which I have given them.

from holding bribes, 5. he who stops his ear from hearing of blood; and 6. shuts his eyes from looking on evil.

Then Micah came and reduced them to three (Micah 6:8), as has been told, "O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of thee? 1. Only to do justly, and 2. to love mercy, and 3. to walk humbly before your God."

Then came Isaiah and reduced them to two (Isaiah 56:1). "Thus said the Lord: 1. Keep justice, 2. do righteousness."

Then Amos came and reduced them all to one principle (Amos 5:4): "For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: Seek Me and live."

The Maharsha rightly remarks that the Talmud does not mean that if one performs the enumerated precepts—six, sixteen or any number—he is a perfect man. Those are holy guides, principles, by which men may live.

וְנִטְעָתִים עַל אֲדָמָתָם וְלֹא יִנָּתְשׁוּ עוֹד מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם.



## 17. OBADIAH [1]

EDOM'S DESTRUCTION

THE VISION of Obadiah: [1] Thus said the

Lord God concerning Edom. [2] I have heard a message from the Lord and a messenger has been sent among the

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[1] OBADIAH: *A name meaning "one who serves God."*

Our Sages say that Obadiah the prophet is the same Obadiah who was governor of King Ahab's household. Rabbi Isaac said, "Let Obadiah, who lived with two evil people—Ahab and Jezebel—and yet did not take example from their deeds, come to prophesy against the wicked Esau who lived with two righteous people—Isaac and Rebecca—and still did not learn from their good deeds."

[2] EDM: *Edomites were said to be the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. Later they were known as Idumeans. Because they were blood brothers, their hostility and treachery to Israel over the centuries was doubly resented.*

שְׁמוּעָה שָׁמְעָנוּ מֵאֵת יְיָ וְצִיר בְּגוֹיִם שָׁלַח.

nations: [3] "Gather yourself together and come against her, rise up for war."

I made you small among nations, greatly despised among men. But the pride of your heart deceived you because you dwell in the cleft of the rock, on the height of the mountain. You say in your heart: "Who can bring me down to the ground?"

But though you mount high as an eagle and set your nest among the stars, I shall bring you down from there.

How you are cut off. If thieves came to you at night, they would steal only till they had enough. If grape-gatherers came to you, they would have left some gleaning grapes. But these robbers searched out Esau and sought out the most hidden places. The men who had a covenant with you conducted you to the border, then prevailed over you. The men who ate your bread set a snare for you.

#### THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

FOR THE VIOLENCE you have done to your brother, shame shall cover you,

And you shall be cut off forever.

On that day that you stood aloof [4]

When strangers plundered his substance,

And foreigners entered his gates

And cast lots on Jerusalem,

You were as one of them.

You should not have gloated on the day of your brother's disaster,

Neither should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah

In the day of their destruction.

Neither should you have magnified yourself with your mouth

In the day of their trouble.

You should not have entered into My people's gate

In the day of their calamity,

☞ [3] A MESSENGER AMONG THE NATIONS: Rabbi Meir taught that Obadiah was himself an Edomite convert, and therefore, "From the very forest itself came the handle of the axe that felled the trees." The descendant of Edom was the most fit person to reprimand the people of Edom for their evil deeds.

☞ [4] YOU STOOD ALOOF: When Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, the Edomites stood aloof and watched from a distance. When any of the people of Israel escaped the city and the besieging Babylonian soldiers, the Edomites caught and killed them.

וְאַל תִּרְא בַּיּוֹם אֶחֱיָךְ בַּיּוֹם נִכְרוּ, וְאַל תִּשְׂמַח לְבְנֵי יְהוּדָה בַּיּוֹם אֲבָדָם.

Nor should you have stood at the  
crossroads [5]  
To cut off those who escaped;  
Neither should you have delivered  
up to the enemy  
Those who remained in the day of  
distress.  
The day of the Lord is near upon  
all the nations;  
As you have done, it shall be done  
to you;  
Your deeds shall return upon your  
own head. [6]  
On that day, said the Lord, I shall  
destroy the wise men of Edom  
And wisdom out of the mount of  
Esau.  
The mighty men of Teman shall be  
dismayed,  
So that every man may be cut off

from the mount of Esau by  
slaughter.  
As you have drunk upon My holy  
mountain,  
So shall all the nations continually  
drink the cup of fury;  
They shall drink and gulp down  
And become as if they had not been.

#### ISRAEL WILL BE RESTORED

BUT MOUNT ZION shall be a refuge and  
it shall be holy. The house of Jacob shall  
possess its own possessions. And the  
house of Jacob shall be fire, and the house  
of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau  
shall be stubble. They shall kindle them  
and devour them, and none shall remain  
of the house of Esau. Then they shall pos-  
sess the Negev, the mount of Esau, and the

🔥 [5] AT THE CROSSROADS: The Edomites waited to see who would have the upper hand in the battle. If the Babylonians, then they would join them; if the people of Israel, they would join them.

🔥 [6] UPON YOUR OWN HEAD: King Antonius asked Rabbi Jehudah, "Shall I enter the world to come?"

"Yes," the rabbi answered.

"But," the king asked again, "is it not written, 'There shall be no remnant of the house of Esau'?"

Rabbi Yehudah nodded. "It applies only to those whose evil deeds are like those of Esau."

וְבָהָר צִיּוֹן תִּהְיֶה פְּלִיטָה וְהָיָה קִדְשׁ, וְיָרְשׁוּ בֵּית יִצְחָק אֶת מוֹרְשֵׁיהֶם.

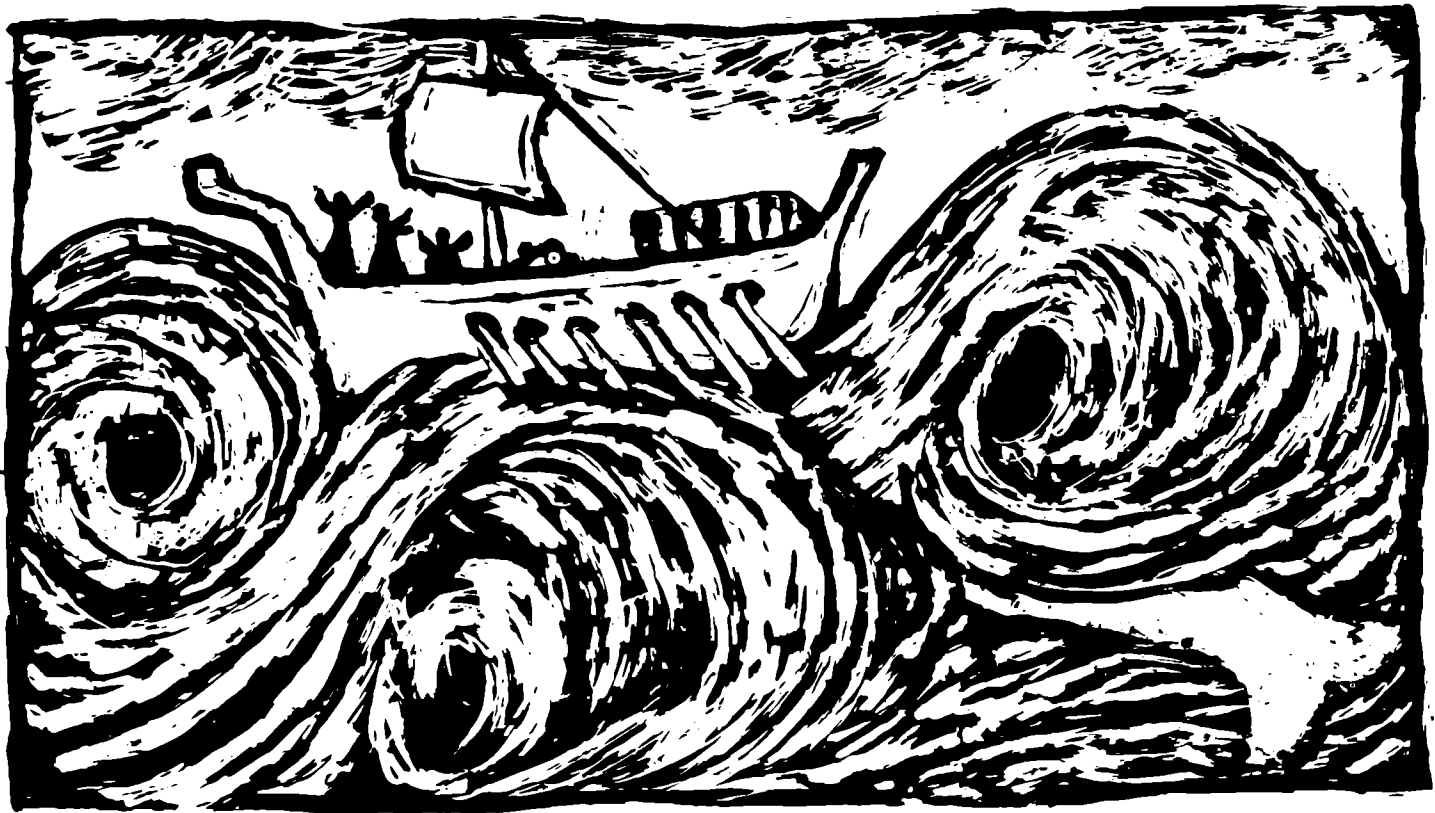


lowlands of the Philistines. They shall possess the field of Ephraim and the field of Samaria, and the people of Ammon in Gilead; and the captivity of the host of the children of Israel shall possess that which belonged to the Canaanites, even

to Zarephath, and the captivity of Jerusalem that is in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negev.

Saviors shall come out of the mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

וְעָלוּ מוֹשִׁיעִים בְּהָר צִיּוֹן לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת הָהָר עֲשׂו, וְהָיְתָה לִיְיָ הַמְּלוּכָה.



## 18. JONAH [1-4]

### FLIGHT FROM THE LORD

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying: “Arise, go to

Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it that its wickedness has come up before Me.” But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish [1] from the presence of the

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[1] FLEE TO TARSHISH: How could Jonah believe that he could flee the presence of God? Is it not written, “The eyes of the Lord see through the whole world” (Zechariah 4:10). Our Sages explain that Jonah thought he could flee to a country outside of the land of Israel, where the Divine Presence did not rest on prophets. Then the Lord spoke to Jonah, saying, “You are like the unruly servant of the *kohen* who runs to the cemetery where his master’s hand cannot reach him. But the stupid servant forgets that his master has many servants at his disposal who can be sent to fetch him from the burial ground. So will I send one of My messengers for you—a storm—and it will bring you back.”

קוֹם לְךָ אֶל נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרָא עָלֶיהָ, כִּי עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לְפָנַי.

Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid his fare [2] and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

But the Lord hurled a great wind into the sea, and it became a mighty tempest and it was feared that the ship would be broken. The sailors were frightened and each cried to his god. Then they threw into the sea the wares that were in the ship to lighten it. But Jonah had gone down into the innermost part of the ship; he lay there and fell asleep. The shipmaster came to him and said to him: "Why are you sleeping? Arise and call to your God. Perhaps God will think of us and we will not perish. [3] [And Jonah did not answer.]

#### INTO THE SEA

THEN THE SAILORS said to one another:

"Come, let us cast lots that we may know who caused this calamity to fall upon us." They cast lots and the lot fell upon Jonah. So they said to him: "What is your occupation? From where do you come? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

And he said to them: "I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord of heaven who has made the sea and the dry land, and I fled from the Lord's presence."

And the men became very frightened because the sea grew more and more stormy, and they said to him: "What shall we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"

And he said to them: "Take me up and throw me into the sea and the sea will become calm. I know that this great storm is upon you because of me." [4]

[But the men were reluctant to do it.] They rowed hard to bring the ship to the land, but they could not, because the sea

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☞ [2] HE PAID HIS FARE: So anxious was Jonah to flee the Lord that he paid for the hire of the entire ship.

☞ [3] WE WILL NOT PERISH: Why were the ship's sailors so frightened? Because, though they were experienced seamen, they had never before seen such a storm, which raged only where their ship sailed and left other ships undisturbed.

☞ [4] BECAUSE OF ME: The sailors did not believe at first that Jonah's disobedience could cause the storm. So they held him over the side in the

עֲבָרִי אֲנֹכִי, וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יָרָא, אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת הַיַּבָּשָׁה.

became more and more tempestuous. [5] They cried to the Lord and said: "We beseech You, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us [his] innocent blood. You, Yourself, have brought this about." So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea and the sea ceased its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him.

#### THE GREAT FISH

NOW THE LORD had ready a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, out of the belly of the fish:

I called out of my affliction

To the Lord, and He answered me.

Out of the belly of the netherworld

I cried

sea up to his waist and the storm stopped and the sea calmed. When they drew him back on deck, the storm raged as before. Again the sailors put him over the side, this time up to his neck, and the storm once more ceased and the sea grew calm. Yet no sooner did they lift him to the vessel when the storm burst forth with full fury once more. At last, before casting Jonah overboard, the sailors cried out, "We beseech Thee, O Lord, lay not upon us the innocent blood of Jonah. We are doing this to fulfill Your desire that we cast him into the sea."

☞ [5] MORE AND MORE TEMPESTUOUS: The Book of Jonah may be seen as an allegory of man's journey through the world. Jonah's descent into the ship is symbolic of man's descent into this world, which is so full of vexation. Man, then, is in the world as in a ship which is traversing a great and stormy ocean. Man believes that when he commits a sin, he can flee from the presence of the Master who takes no notice of the world. The Almighty then rouses a furious tempest which assails the ship, and man, caught in the tempest, is struck down. Although man is prostrate, his soul does not exert itself to return to the Master to make good its omissions. Some plead in behalf of the accused, as the sailors did for Jonah, and strive to restore him to the world. But they cannot. for the "sea grew more and more stormy against them."

קָרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֵל יְיָ וַיַּעֲנֵנִי, מִבֶּטֶן שָׁאוֹל שׁוֹעֲתִי, שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי.

And You heard my voice.  
 You cast me into the depth,  
 In the heart of the seas,  
 And the flood surrounded me.  
 All Your waves and Your billows  
 Passed over me.  
 And I said: "I am cast out  
 From before Your eyes"; [6]  
 Yet I will look again toward Your  
 holy temple.  
The waters compassed me around,  
even to the soul;

The deep was round about me;  
The weeds were wrapped about  
my head.  
 I went down to the bottoms of the  
 mountains;  
 The earth with her bars closed upon  
 me for ever;  
 Yet have You brought up my life  
 from the pit,  
 O, Lord my God.  
 And the Lord spoke to the fish [7] and  
 it vomited Jonah upon dry land.

❧ [6] FROM BEFORE YOUR EYES: Our Sages said that three prophets were different in their views. The prophet Jeremiah defended the people of Israel and demanded honor for the Lord, saying: "We have transgressed and have rebelled, but Thou hast not pardoned" (Lamentations 3:42). Jeremiah demanded that the people honor God but also demanded compassion from the Lord for the people.

The prophet Elijah demanded only that the children of Israel honor the Lord, but did not demand compassion for the Israelites from God. Elijah said, "I have been zealous for the Lord, because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant" (I Kings 19:10). Because of that Elijah was punished. The Lord took away his gift of prophecy.

But the prophet Jonah demanded honor only for Israel, and refused the Lord's summons to go to Nineveh. He feared that if he succeeded in his mission, the Lord would forgive Nineveh. But the Lord punished him for his refusal and spoke to him only once more. As it is written, "And the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time" (3:1).

❧ [7] THE LORD SPOKE TO THE FISH: When the Lord is said to have spoken to the fish, it means that He gave the fish the will to act in that way;

אֶפְפוּנֵי מַיִם עַד נֶפֶשׁ, תְּהוּם יְסוּבְבֵנִי, סוּף חָבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי.

## THE PROPHET GOES TO NINEVEH

AND THE WORD OF THE LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying: "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to her all that I bid you." [8] So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh as the Lord had commanded him. Now, Nineveh was a very great city, a city of three days journey [from one end to the other].

Jonah entered into the city and walked a day's journey into it, and called out:

"After forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down on the east side of it. There he made for himself a booth and sat in its shade, and waited to see what would become of the city.

And the people of Nineveh believed in God; [9] and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he

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therefore, the prophet ascribes the act, the deed, directly to God. Similarly, "Events caused by man's free will, such as war, the dominion of one nation over another, the attempt of one person to hurt or insult another, are ascribed to God."

🌀 [8] ALL THAT I BID YOU: The yoke of the Lord is sometimes heavy, and Moses at first refused it and did not wish to be the Lord's messenger. "I pray Thee," he begged, "send anyone but me" (Exodus 4:13). "O, Lord, I am not a man of words... for I am slow of speech, and of a heavy tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Jeremiah also did not wish to prophesy and begged God, "O Lord, God, I cannot speak because I am so young." But, like Moses, he too obeyed. Jonah also first refused the Lord's summons to go to Nineveh and went only when the mission was thrust upon him.

🌀 [9] NINEVEH BELIEVED IN GOD: Because the people of Nineveh believed Jonah, they turned from their evil ways and repented with their whole hearts. Our Sages tell us that they even restored stolen things to their rightful owners. When the Lord saw their deeds, he accepted their repentance and did not punish them as He had planned.

וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר: עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת.

arose from his throne, put off his royal robe, covered himself with a sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he commanded it to be proclaimed throughout Nineveh: "Let neither man nor beast, cattle nor sheep, taste anything, food or drink. Let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily to God. Let every one turn away from his evil ways, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may repent and turn away from His fierce anger and we shall not perish."

And God saw their deeds, that they did turn away from their evil ways. God relented of the calamity which He said He would bring upon them, and He did it not.

#### JONAH REBUKED

AND THIS WAS EVIL to Jonah, very evil, and he was vexed. He prayed to the Lord and said: "O Lord, is it not this I said when I was yet upon the earth of my own country? Therefore I fled to Tarshish, because I knew that You are a gracious God and compassionate, long-suffering and abundant in mercy and

ready to relent. Therefore, O Lord, I beseech You, take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Then the Lord God prepared a gourd to be a shade over Jonah's head to save him from discomfort. And Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm, and the next morning, when the sun arose, the worm gnawed the gourd till it withered. And it came to pass when the sun arose that God sent a burning east wind and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah that he fainted, and he wished himself dead. "It is better for me to die than to live."

Then God said to Jonah: "Are you sorry for the gourd?" And Jonah answered: "I am very sorry, even to death."

Then the Lord said: "You have had pity on the gourd, for which you have not labored, nor did you make it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand children who cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?"

וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה.



## 19. MICAH [1-7]

THE WORD OF THE LORD [1] that came to  
Micah [2] the Morashtite in the days of

Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Ju-  
dah, concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

[1] THE WORD OF THE LORD: The Lord said: "Surely I spoke to the prophets, but through a vision, therefore one prophecy is not exactly like the other." As it is written, Amos saw the Lord standing—"I saw God standing beside the altar" (9:1). Micah saw God sitting on His throne (I Kings 22:19). Moses saw Him as a warrior—"The Lord is a man of war" (Exodus 15:3). Daniel saw Him as an old man—"I beheld till thrones were placed and one that was old... did sit and the hair of his head like pure wool" (Daniel 7:9). It is also written that the Lord has spoken to the prophets and multiplied parables (Hosea 12:11).

[2] MICAH: *This is an abbreviated version of Micaiah, which means "who is like unto God."*

רָאִיתִי אֶת יְיָ יוֹשֵׁב עַל כְּסֵאוֹ.



## THE LORD JUDGES SAMARIA

HEAR, YOU PEOPLES, all of you; give heed earth and all her fullness; and let the Lord God be my witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.

Behold, the Lord comes forth from His place and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. The mountains shall melt under Him like wax under fire, and the valleys shall split asunder as [when] waters are poured down from a steep place. All this [comes] because of the transgression of Jacob and the sins of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the sin of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?

I will make Samaria a ruined field, [3] a place for planting vineyards. I will pour down stones into the valley and lay bare

its foundation. All her graven images shall be shattered and all her gifts to her temples shall be burned in fire, and all her wooden and metal idols will lie desolate because she has gathered them from the hire of a harlot [4] and to a harlot's hire they shall return.

For this I will lament and wail, I will go barefoot and naked. [5] I will howl like a jackal and moan like an ostrich. For her wound is incurable! It comes to Judah, it reaches the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.

## OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

WOE TO THEM who devise iniquity during the night and plan to carry out the evil. In the morning light they execute it because the power is in their hands. They covet fields and seize them, and houses they take away. Thus they crush a man

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☞ [3] A RUINED FIELD: No prophet or sage has ever announced the destruction of the universe, or a change in the present conditions, or a permanent change in any of its properties.

☞ [4] THE HIRE OF A HARLOT: *Idolatry and harlotry are often identified, so that sacrifices to graven images are considered "the hire of a harlot."*

☞ [5] BAREFOOT AND NAKED: *Jews did not indulge in nudity as did the Greeks. Instead, what is meant here is removing shoes and outer clothing to demonstrate mourning.*

הוֹי חוֹשְׁבֵי אֶזְנֵי וּפְעֻלֵי רֶגֶעַל מְשֻׁכְּבוֹתָם, בְּאֹרֶת הַבִּקְרָה יַעֲשׂוּהָ כִּי יֵשׁ לְאֵל יִדְם.

and his household, even a man and his heritage. [6]

You became My people's enemy. You strip the garment and the mantle from those who pass by peacefully so that they appear as men returning from war. The women of My people you drive out of their pleasant homes, and from their young children you take away My splendor.

Therefore, I am devising a disaster against this family, said the Lord, from which you shall not be able to remove your neck nor will you be able to walk upright. [7] It shall be an evil time. In that day a taunting song shall be sung

against you and a lament shall be raised, saying: "We are utterly ruined; the heritage of my people has changed masters. How was it removed from me? To the enemy were my fields allotted, and now we are utterly ruined." Therefore, there will be no heirs [8] that shall be measured by a measuring line or by casting lots in the congregation of Israel.

#### THE LEADERS DENOUNCED

AND I SAID: Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel. [9] Is it not for you to know justice? But they hate good and love evil,

☞ [6] A MAN AND HIS HERITAGE: Whoever causes his fellowman loss of property whether indirectly or directly, as by stealing, cannot be considered truly repentant until he has repaid the money, or restored the property.

☞ [7] TO WALK UPRIGHT: *The yoke will force them to walk bent over, burdened, like animals.*

☞ [8] NO HEIRS: The children of Israel, when they were in God's good graces, prayed for power over the *yetzer hara*, but they were warned, "Know that if you destroy the *yetzer hara*, the world will end." Nonetheless they took power over the evil propensity and imprisoned it for three days; but in those three days not a child was conceived or born in all of Israel.

☞ [9] THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL: Rav said that scholars do not have to be warned about doing evil because they cannot claim to be ignorant of the

וַאֲמַר: שְׁמָעוּ נָא רָאשֵׁי יַעֲקֹב וְקִצְיֵי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, הֲלֹא לָכֶם לְדַעַת אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּט.

they flay the skin from them and their flesh from their bones. Then they eat the flesh of My people and break their bones; yes, they chop them in pieces, like meat which is put in a pot and flesh in a cauldron. Then, when they shall cry to the Lord, He will not answer them. He will hide His face from them because they did evil things.

#### THE PROPHETS DENOUNCED

THUS SAID THE LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray. They cry, "Peace," when their teeth have any thing to bite. [10] But when one does not put anything into their mouths, they declare war against him. Therefore, it shall be night to you, that you shall have no vision; darkness for you, that you shall not divine. The sun shall set upon these prophets and the day shall become black

over them. [11] The seers shall be put to shame, the diviners confounded. They shall all cover their upper lips, for there shall be no answer from God. But I am full of power and justice and strength by the spirit of God, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

#### ISRAEL'S MORAL DECLINE

WOE IS ME, as in the last of the summer fruit, as in the time of grape gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat, nor an early fig that my soul desires.

The godly man is perished from out  
of the earth

And there is none righteous among  
men.

They all lie in wait for blood;

Each hunts his brother with a net.

They have made ready their hands  
to do evil diligently;

---

law as ordinary people can. Rabbi Johanan said that it was like fine linen which is ruined if it is even slightly soiled, while rough burlap can hardly even be harmed by dirt.

☞ [10] ANY THING TO BITE: *People who paid prophets were sure to receive favorable forecasts.*

☞ [11] SHALL BECOME BLACK OVER THEM: *The image of an eclipse is meant symbolically to be the eclipse of these prophets and diviners. It also speaks of the darkness of mind in which they work.*

אֲבָד חֲסִיד מִן הָאָרֶץ, וַיֵּשֶׁר בְּאָדָם אֵין.

The prince asks for a bribe, and the  
judge renders a decision  
for a reward.

The great man speaks openly the  
evil desire of his soul;

Thus they are woven together in  
the conspiracy to pervert justice.  
The best of them is like a brier,  
The most upright is worse than a  
thorn hedge.

The day that was foretold to you,  
the day of punishment, has  
come.

Now it shall be their wrack and  
ruin.

Trust not in a friend.

Put no confidence in an intimate;

From her that lies in your bosom

Guard the doors of your mouth.

The son dishonors the father,

The daughter rises up against her  
mother,

The daughter-in-law against her  
her mother-in-law,

A man's enemies are the men in his  
own house.

#### THE DOOM OF JERUSALEM

HEAR THIS NOW, heads of the house of  
Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel,  
that abhor justice and make crooked  
everything which is straight, that build  
Zion with blood and Jerusalem with  
iniquity. Her heads judge for bribes, the  
priests give decisions for hire, and the  
prophets divine for money. Yet they  
lean upon the Lord and say: "Is not the  
Lord in our midst? How can evil befall  
us?" [12] Therefore, because of you,  
Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jeru-  
salem will become a ruin, and the moun-  
tain of the house a high place in the  
forest.

#### GOD CONTENTS WITH ISRAEL

HEAR YOU NOW what the Lord said [to  
me]: "Plead your case before the moun-

✎ [12] HOW CAN EVIL BEFALL US: What kinds of prayers are forbidden? Prayers which seek to undo what had been done, or to reverse the course of nature. He who utters such prayers does so in vain. If a man should see a fire in the distance, he may not pray, "May it not be my house!" The fire already rages in that particular house and it may very well be his. A man should not pray to God regarding what is already done and past.

לִכְן בְּגִלְלָכֶם צִיּוֹן שְׂדֵה תַחְרֹשׁ, וִירוּשָׁלַיִם עֵיִין תִּהְיֶה, וְהָר הַבַּיִת לְבָמוֹת יָעַר.

tains and let the hills hear your voice.”  
O, you mountains, hear the Lord’s controversy and give ear you foundations of the earth. The Lord has a controversy with His people and will contend with Israel:

“My people, what have I done to you?  
And with what have I wearied you?  
Answer Me. I brought you up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of bondage. O, My people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, devised, and what did Balaam, the son of Beor, answer him. [Remember what happened] from Shittim to Gilgal that you may understand the righteous acts of the Lord.” [13]

With what shall I come before the Lord,  
And bow myself before God most high?  
Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings,  
With year-old calves?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousand of rams,  
With ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I give [Him] my first-born for my transgression,  
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? [14]  
This is what you, O man, have been told is good, [15]  
And what the Lord requires of you:

☞ [13] THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE LORD: A king had wounded his son with a sharp blow and bandaged the wound, saying, “My son, as long as this bandage covers your wound, you may do anything you want, yet you will suffer no ill effects. But if you take the bandage off, a profound sore will plague you.” Thus the Lord spoke of the *yetzer hara*, for the Lord had created the propensity for evil and then given the children of Israel the Torah as an antidote. So long as Israel occupies itself with Torah, the *yetzer hara* will not be able to control man nor bring him harm.

☞ [14] THE SIN OF MY SOUL: The child who is descended from you often teaches you.

☞ [15] WHAT MAN HAS BEEN TOLD IS GOOD: He who persuades his fellow-man to perform a good deed, it is as if he himself had performed it.

הַיֵּד לְךָ אָדָם מֶה טוֹב, וּמָה יֵי דוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ:

Only to do justice and to love  
mercy [16]  
And to walk humbly before the  
Lord.

#### THE GATHERING OF EXILES

ON THAT DAY, said the Lord, I will gather the lame and the lost and the afflicted. I will preserve the cast-off as a remnant, and make those who are weary of wandering into a mighty nation. And the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion for ever. I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel. I will put them together as sheep in the fold, as a flock in the midst of the pasture, and the cities shall become a multitude of men.

The one who clears a way will go forth before them. They will break

through the gate and go forth through it. Their king shall pass on before them and the Lord at their head. And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many nations, [17] as dew from the Lord, as showers upon grass, that does not put its hope in man and does not need the aid of men.

And it shall come to pass on that day that I will cut off the horses from your midst and destroy your chariots. I will cut off the [fortified] cities of your land and I will throw down all your strongholds. I will cut off witchcraft from your land and you shall have no more soothsayers; and I will cut off graven images and your pillars out of your midst, and you shall no longer worship the work of your hand. I will uproot your Asherim from your midst and I will destroy your enemies. [18]

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☞ [16] TO LOVE MERCY: If you tear your hearts with repentance, it will not be necessary for you to tear your clothes in mourning for the deaths of your sons.

☞ [17] IN THE MIDST OF MANY NATIONS: Rabbi Johanan said: "After the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the mouths of prophets and put into the mouths of the foolish and into the mouths of babes."

☞ [18] I WILL DESTROY YOUR ENEMIES: When an idol is smashed, its priests are terrified.

כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצָּנֶע לָכֶת עִם אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

## THE FUTURE GLORY

IN THE END OF DAYS it shall come to pass that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on top of the mountain, and it shall be exalted above all the hills. Many nations shall go and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths." [19] For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. [20]

And He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide concerning mighty nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war any more. [21] But they shall sit every man under his vine and fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of the host has spoken. All the people shall walk each one in the name of its god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

Who is like You, O God, who forgives the iniquity and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not keep His anger for ever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion upon us. He will subdue our iniquities and cast all our sins into the ocean. You shall show faithfulness to Jacob, mercy to Abraham, as You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

☞ [19] WALK IN HIS PATHS: A Jew is commanded to perform deeds of mercy for those who are not of his brotherhood.

☞ [20] FROM JERUSALEM: In this world, only individuals were prophets; in the world to come, all the children of Israel will be prophets.

☞ [21] LEARN WAR ANY MORE: The Lord required that Moses make war on Sihon (Deut. 2:24), but instead Moses sent messengers of peace to Sihon. Then the Lord said, "I commanded you to make war, but you have made overtures of peace." "There is no peace for the wicked," says the Lord. How great must be the command for peace if Israel disobeyed God's word for the sake of peace—and the Lord was not angry with them.

תָּתֵן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב, חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְרָהָם מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם.



## 20. NAHUM [1-3]

### THE AVENGING GOD

THE PROPHECY on Nineveh, [1] the book of vision of Nahum [2] the Elkoshite.

The Lord is a jealous God. He avenges and is full of wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries and He bears wrath for His enemies. The Lord is long-

suffering and great in power, and He will by no means clear the guilty. The whirlwind and the tempest are His way, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up, and He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither and the flower of Lebanon fades away. The mountains quake

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[1] NINEVEH: *The capital of the Assyrian empire. After its people had repented during the time when Jonah prophesied, they returned to their evil-doings.*

[2] NAHUM: *A name meaning "full of comfort." Nahum is a comforting prophet who foretells only the destruction of Nineveh, and does not rebuke Israel.*

יְיָ אֱרֹךְ אַפַּיִם וְיִגְדַּל-כֹּחַ, וְיִנְקָה לֹא יִנְקָה.



before Him and the hills melt. The earth shakes at His presence, the world and all who dwell in it.

Who can stand before His wrath? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are shattered before Him.

The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble to those who seek refuge in Him. [3]

But with an overrunning flood, He will make a full end to Nineveh and darkness shall pursue His enemies.

#### NINEVEH'S DOOM

WOE TO THE BLOODY CITY, full of lies and plunder. Slaughter does not cease in her. I am against you, says the Lord, I will burn and send your chariots up in smoke and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the

earth, and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more.

The gates of the rivers are opened and the palace melts away. [4] Nineveh has been, as of old, full of defenders like a pool of water, yet they flee away. [One cries:] "Stand! Stand!" but none looks back.

The crack of the whip, the rattling of wheels, prancing of horses and jolting of chariots. The horsemen charge, the flashing sword, and the glittering spear. A multitude of slain, a heap of carcasses, and there is no end to corpses. They stumble upon their corpses.

[All this came to you] Because of the many harlotries, your greatly favored harlot, mistress of witchcraft, that sold nations through her harlotries, and peoples through her witchcraft.

I am against you, says the Lord of hosts. I will pull up your skirts to your face, [5] and I will let the nations see your

☞ [3] WHO SEEK REFUGE IN HIM: The children of Israel lamented, asking when the day of their redemption would come, and the Lord replied: "My children, when great afflictions are upon you, you may be sure that redemption is near."

☞ [4] THE PALACE MELTS AWAY: *Nineveh was surrounded by a moat.*

☞ [5] YOUR SKIRTS TO YOUR FACE: *Such exposure was the punishment for adultery. All those who had suffered by Assyrian betrayal will now see how Nineveh is humiliated.*

פָּרַשׁ מֵעֲלֶהּ וְלֵהָב חָרַב וּבֶרֶק חֲנִית וְרֹב חֶלֶל וְכָבֵד פָּגַר, וְאִין קֶצֶה לְגִוְיָהּ.

nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame. I will throw loathsome things upon you and make you vile, and I will make you as dung so that everyone that sees you will flee from you and say: "Nineveh is destroyed. Who will bemoan her? Whence shall I seek comforters for her?"

Are you better than No-amon, [6] that sat among rivers, with water all around her, whose rampart was the sea and the sea her wall [of the stronghold]? Yet she was carried away and went into captivity. Her young children were dashed to pieces at the head of every street. They cast lots for her honored men and all her great men were bound in chains. [7]

You too will be made drunk and reel, and you shall seek refuge from the enemy. All your fortresses shall be like fig-trees with the first ripe fruit; if they be shaken, they fall into the eater's mouth. Behold, the warriors among you are but women. The gates of your land will be opened wide to your enemies. The fire has devoured the bars [of the gates].

Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria, your nobles are dead, your people are scattered upon the mountains, and there is none to gather them. There is no healing your wound; your wound is mortal. All who hear the report [of your fall] shall clap hands, for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually? [8]

☞ [6] NO-AMON: *A city in Egypt, also thought to be an impregnable fortress, but which had been breached and burned to the ground half a century before Ashurbanipal destroyed Nineveh.*

☞ [7] BOUND IN CHAINS: The sword comes into the world because justice is delayed and perverted; and the sword also comes into the world because of those who pervert the meaning of the Law. Captivity enters the world because of idolatry, immorality and bloodshed.

☞ [8] YOUR WICKEDNESS PASSED CONTINUALLY: If the Lord wishes the world to continue, there cannot be strict justice; if the Lord insists on strict justice, the world cannot endure.

כל שומעי שמעך תקעו כף עליה, כי על מי לא עברה רעתך תמיד?

GOOD TIDINGS TO JUDAH

BEHOLD upon the mountain the feet of him that brings good tidings, that proclaims peace. Celebrate your feasts, Judah, fulfill your vows; for the wicked

one shall never again pass through you; [9] he was utterly cut off. Though the destroyers have devastated Jacob and Israel and marred their branches, I will restore the vine of Jacob and likewise the vine of Israel.

☞ [9] PASS THROUGH YOU: Rabbi Johanan said that a man was walking on the road one night when his lantern went out. He lit it again, but again it went out. So he said to himself, "Why should I bother with this lantern? I will wait by the roadside until the sun comes up and then I will continue my journey."

So it is with the children of Israel. They were enslaved in Egypt and Moses brought them forth. They were enslaved in Babylon and Zerubabel led them out. They were enslaved in Persia and Mordecai led them forth. They were enslaved by Greece and the Maccabees freed them. When, once again, they were enslaved by Rome, they pleaded, "O, Lord, do not free us again through the intervention of a man. We are weary with the succession of enslavement, freedom and enslavement again. Free us Yourself, O Lord, our Redeemer."

חַנִּי יְהוּדָה חַנִּיךָ, שְׁלָמִי נְדָרֶיךָ, כִּי לֹא יוֹסִיף עוֹד לַעֲבֹר-בְּךָ בְּלִיעֵל, כָּל־הַ  
נִכְרָת.



## 21. HABAKKUK [1-3]

### THE PROPHET'S QUESTION

THE PROPHECY which Habakkuk [1] the prophet saw in a vision: How long, O Lord, shall I cry to You and You will not

hear? I cry to You about violence and You do not help. Why do You show me iniquity? You look at mischief, and there is pillage and violence before me. Strife occurs and contention arises. Therefore the law is numbed and justice [2] never

[1] HABAKKUK: *The name may derive from the Hebrew word habag, which means "to embrace."*

[2] JUSTICE NEVER GOES FORTH: A king had a lovely drinking cup so delicately fashioned that if he poured hot water into it it would crack; and if he poured ice-cold water into it, it would also crack. Therefore he mixed hot and cold so that he could pour it safely into the cup.

So it is with the Lord, who said that had He created the world only

עַד אֲנִי יְיָ שׁוֹעֵתִי וְלֹא תִשְׁמַע, אֲזַעַק אֶלֶיךָ חֶמְס וְלֹא תוֹשִׁיעַ.

goes forth. The wicked besets the righteous and perverted justice goes forth. [3]

#### THE SUCCESS OF THE VIOLENT

LOOK YOU among the nations and look on in amazement, [for behold] a deed shall be done in your days which you will not believe were it told to you. He has raised up the Chaldeans, that bitter and impetuous nation, that march through the breadth of the land to seize dwelling places that are not theirs. They

are terrible and dreadful. They carry their own law and justice. [4]

Their horses are swifter than leopards and fiercer than the wolves of the desert;  
their horsemen are many and come from afar, they swoop like vultures that hasten to devour. All of them come for violence and gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings and deride princes. They laugh at all strongholds, they heap up earth [opposite it] and take it. Then they sweep on like wind, pass on. They make strength their god. [5]

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with mercy, sin would multiply beyond all limits. Had he created the world only with justice, the world could not have endured. And so the Lord created the world with both justice and mercy.

- ☞ [3] PERVERTED JUSTICE GOES FORTH: Do not abandon your belief in retribution.
- ☞ [4] THEIR OWN LAW AND JUSTICE: Rabbi Judah ben Tema says: Be strong as the leopard, swift as the eagle, fleet as the gazelle, and brave as the lion, to do the will of the Lord who is in heaven.
- ☞ [5] THEY MAKE STRENGTH THEIR GOD: Ten strong things were created in the world: a mountain is strong but iron can break it; iron is strong but fire can melt it; fire is strong but water can extinguish it; water is strong but clouds can carry it; clouds are strong but winds can scatter them; wind is strong but the body can carry it as breath; the body is strong but terror can break it; terror is strong but wine can drive it out; wine is strong but sleep can overcome it; death, however, is stronger than all.

וְקָלוּ מִנְּמָרִים סוּסָיו וְיָחֲדוּ מִזְאֲבֵי עָרָב, וּפָשׁוּ פָּרָשָׁיו.

## THE QUESTION REPEATED

BUT ARE YOU NOT FROM EVERLASTING, Lord my God, my Holy One, Immortal One? Have You ordained him for judgment; O Rock, have You established him for chastisement? But You are too pure of eye to look upon evil. You cannot gaze upon wrongdoing. Why, then, do you look upon treacherous men and keep silent, when the wicked swallows up the man that is more righteous than he? [6]

You make man as the fishes of the sea, as creeping things, that have no ruler over them. He brings them all up with the hook. He catches them in his net and

gathers them in his seine. Therefore he rejoices and exults, and sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his seine. Shall he keep emptying his net and never cease to slay nations? [7]

I will stand upon my watch and station myself upon the tower, and will look out to see what He will speak to me and what answer He will make to my complaint.

## GOD'S REPLY ONCE MORE

AND THE LORD ANSWERED ME and said: Write the vision clearly upon tablets that one may read it readily. The vision is for a set time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it tarry, wait for it, for it will

סג [6] MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN HE: Everything is given on pledge, and a net is spread for all living men: the shop is open, the shopkeeper gives credit, the ledger lies open, the hand writes, and whosoever wishes to borrow may come and borrow. But the collectors make their daily round and exact payment from man, whether he wishes it or not; for they have the necessary evidence in the form of records that have been kept. The judgment is the judgment of truth, and everything is prepared for the feast in the world-to-come.

סג [7] TO SLAY NATIONS: Rabbi Meir said that when the Lord declared, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (Exodus 33:19), God meant it, although that person may not be deserving. When the Lord declared, "and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy," He likewise meant it, although that person may not be deserving of mercy.

עוד חזון למועד ויפח לקץ ולא יכזב; אם יתמהמה חכה לו כי בוא יבוא,  
לא יאחר.

surely come; it will not fail its set time.  
[8] And the righteous shall live by His faithfulness.

He who enlarged his desire like Sheol and is as insatiable as death, gathered all the nations to himself, assembled all the peoples. Shall not all these take up a taunting song against him, saying: "Woe to him that enriches himself with that which is not his own, loads himself with many pledges; for how long?"

Will not your creditors rise up suddenly and exact interest of you, and awake those that shall make you quake,  
[9] and you shall become spoil to them?

Because you have despoiled many nations, all the rest of the people shall despoil you; because the blood of men and the violence done to the land, to the city and to all who dwell therein.

The stone cries out of the wall and the beam out of the wood work shall answer it.

You shall be sated with shame instead of glory. You shall drink also and be poisoned. The cup of the Lord's right hand shall be passed to you and disgrace shall be upon your glory.

#### THE PROPHET'S FAITH

The Lord is in His holy temple,  
Let all the earth be hushed before  
Him.

I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will exult in the God of my salvation.

God, the Lord, is my strength,  
And He makes my feet like hinds' feet  
And He makes me walk on the high places.

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🌀 [8] ITS SET TIME: It is the duty of man to say a benediction for the bad even as he recites one for the good.

🌀 [9] MAKE YOU QUAKE: The wife of Rabbi Hanninah asked her husband to pray that he be given on earth some of the good that was reserved for the righteous in the world to come. Rabbi Hanninah prayed and a leg of a golden table was thrown to him. Later he dreamed that he sat in the next world at a table with only two legs while all the others sat at golden tables with three legs. When he told the dream to his wife, she begged him to pray that the golden table leg be returned to the world to come. The rabbi did, and it was. So his wife learned that you cannot eat at two tables or have the best of both worlds.

וַיְהִיכֵל קִדְשׁוֹ, הֵם מִפְּנֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ.



## 22. ZEPHANIAH [1-3]

THE WORD OF THE LORD which came to Zephaniah [1] the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah [2] the son of Amon, King of Judah.

### APPROACHING DOOM

I WILL UTTERLY DESTROY all things from

off the face of the earth. I will destroy man and beast. I will consume the fowls of the heavens and the fishes of the sea, the idols and their worshipers, said the Lord.

I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; I will cut off Baal [3] to the last remnant in this place, and the name

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[1] ZEPHANIAH: *The name means "he whom God hath hidden (from evil)."*

[2] JOSIAH: *Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and preached in the reign of the Josiah of the Great Reformation.*

[3] BAAL: *The idol worshiped by the Canaanites and Phoenicians.*

אָסר אָדם וּבְהֵמָה, אָסר עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְדֹגֵי הַיָּם וְהַמְכַשְׁלוֹת אֶת הָרָשָׁעִים.



of the idolatrous priests with the priests; and those who prostrate themselves upon the housetops to the host of heaven. And those who worship the Lord and swear by Malcam; [4] and those who have turned away from following the Lord, and those who have not sought the Lord nor inquired after Him.

On that day I will punish the princes and the king's sons who fill their master's house with violence and deceit, and all who dress themselves in foreign gar-

ments. [5] And on the same day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold. [6]

On that day, says the Lord, a cry will be heard from the fish gate [7] and a wailing from the second quarter and a great crash from the hills. Wail, you inhabitants of the valley of Kidron, because all the merchant people are undone; and those who are laden with silver are cut off. [8] And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search through Jerusalem

☞ [4] MALCAM: *The idol worshiped by the Ammonites.*

☞ [5] FOREIGN GARMENTS: *Not only will punishment be meted out to those who worship foreign idols, but to those who adopt foreign manners of dress.*

☞ [6] LEAPS OVER THE THRESHOLD: *The thresholds were places where many of the primitive people made sacrifices when building their houses. Those who leaped over the threshold may also have been those who robbed the poor.*

☞ [7] FROM THE FISH GATE: *The fish gate was near the north wall of the city, where the Tyrians traded in dried fish.*

☞ [8] THOSE WHO ARE LADEN WITH SILVER ARE CUT OFF: There are four types of men: One says, "Mine is mine and thine is thine." He is an ordinary man. A second says, "Mine is thine and thine is mine." He is an *am ha'aretz*. A third says, "Mine is thine and thine is thine." That man is a saint. But the wicked man says, "Thine is mine and mine is mine."

וְהָיָה בַּעֵת הַהִיא אֶחָפֶשׂ אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם בַּנְּרוֹת . . .

with lamps and I will punish the men  
who are settled on their lees, [9] that say  
in their heart: "The Lord will not do  
good, neither will He do evil." [10]  
 Therefore their wealth shall become a  
 booty and their house a desolation. They  
 shall build houses, but shall not dwell in  
 them; and they shall plant vineyards, but  
 shall not drink their wine.

#### THE DAY OF THE LORD

SILENCE in the presence of the Lord, for  
 the day of the Lord is at hand. The Lord  
 has prepared a sacrifice and has sanctified  
 the guests.

The great day of the Lord is near,  
 Near and speeding fast;  
 The sound of the day of the Lord is  
 such

That the mighty man shall cry  
 bitterly.

That day is a day of wrath,  
 A day of trouble and distress,  
 A day of desolation and waste,  
 A day of darkness and gloom,  
 A day of cloud and thick darkness,  
 A day of shofar and battle cry,  
 Against the fortified cities  
 And against the high towers.  
 I will bring distress upon men.  
 They shall walk like blind,  
 Because they have sinned against  
 the Lord. [11]

Neither their silver nor their gold  
 Shall be able to save them.  
 In the day of the Lord's wrath,  
 When the fire of His jealousy shall  
 devour the whole earth;  
 For He will make a fearful end.  
 Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

☞ [9] SETTLED ON THEIR LEES: *This is a figure of speech from winemaking; it refers to men who have become smug and complacent so that their moral discrimination has been dulled.*

☞ [10] NEITHER WILL HE DO EVIL: With Him there is no unrighteousness, nor forgetfulness, nor respect for persons, nor taking of bribes.

☞ [11] SINNED AGAINST THE LORD: The *yetzer hara* does not walk on the sidewalks but in the middle of the road. When the evil impulse sees a man swaggering, it says: "This person belongs to me."

... וּפְקִדְתִּי עַל הָאֲנָשִׁים הַקּוֹפְאִים עַל שְׁמֵרֵיהֶם, הָאוֹמְרִים בְּלִבָּבָם: לֹא יִיטִיב  
 יִי וְלֹא יִרָע.

## ASSYRIA'S DOOM

HE [the Lord], will stretch out His hand against the north and destroy Assyria. He will make Nineveh a desolation, dry as a desert. And droves of all kinds of beasts shall lie down in her midst. The pelican and the night owl will roost on the top of the broken pillars. Birds shall sing in the windows because all the cedar beams shall be laid bare. Desolation shall be on the thresholds.

This is the joyous city, that dwelt in security, that said in her heart: "I am, and there is none else beside me." How has she become a desolation, a lair for beasts. Every one that passes by her shall hiss and make a gesture with his hand.

## JERUSALEM ARRAIGNED

WOE, defiant and defiled one, the oppressing city! [12] She has not accepted correction. She has listened to no voice. She has not trusted in the Lord and she has not drawn near to her God.

The princes in her midst are roaring lions, her judges are desert wolves. [13] They leave not a bone until the morning. Her prophets are reckless [14] and treacherous men. Her priests profaned that which is holy; they have done violence to the Law. [15]

I have cut off nations. I have destroyed their battlements. I have made their squares desolate. I have laid waste their cities so there is no man, so that there is

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☞ [12] THE OPPRESSING CITY: *The prophet now turns to indict Jerusalem for its evils.*

☞ [13] HER JUDGES ARE DESERT WOLVES: *Power buries its possessors.*

☞ [14] HER PROPHETS ARE RECKLESS: *The prophets were false prophets, and they did not present the Lord's true arraignment of the people's sins.*

☞ [15] VIOLENCE TO THE LAW: *The priests did not carry out their duty to teach people the law truthfully.*

זאת העיר העליזה, היושבת לבטח, האומרה בלבבה: אני, ואפסי עוד.

no inhabitant. I said: "Surely you will fear Me, you will take correction; [16] it cannot be cut off from their eyes all that I did to them but they have zealously made all their doings corrupt.

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth  
That did His bidding;  
Seek righteousness, seek humility.  
It may be that you shall be hidden  
on the day of the Lord's anger.

## CALL TO REPENT

Gather yourselves together,  
Yes, gather together  
You people who yearn for God,  
Before darkness descends  
The day passes like chaff,  
Before the fierce wrath of the Lord  
comes upon you,  
Before the day of the Lord's anger  
comes upon you.

## PROMISE TO THE FAITHFUL

WAIT FOR ME, said the Lord, until the day  
I rise up as a witness against the nations;  
for My decision is to gather up the na-  
tions, to assemble kingdoms, to pour  
upon them My indignation, all My  
fierce anger. In the fire of My zeal all the  
earth shall be devoured. Then I will re-  
store to the people a pure language that

🕯 [16] YOU WILL TAKE CORRECTION: In Rome the Empress lost her bracelet and Rabbi Samuel found it. A herald announced that whoever returned the bracelet within thirty days would receive a rich reward, but if the bracelet were found on his person thereafter, he would be beheaded. Rabbi Samuel, however, did not return the bracelet to the Empress until after the thirty days had passed. "Did you have the bracelet earlier?" she asked him. He nodded. "Did you hear the proclamation?" Again he nodded. "Then why did you not return the bracelet before the thirty days were past?" she asked. Then Rabbi Samuel replied, "So that you might not say that I feared you, or coveted the reward; but that I returned it only because I feared God."

בְּקֶשׁוֹ צֶדֶק, בְּקֶשׁוֹ עֲנוּהָ, אוֹלֵי תַסְתְּרוּ בַּיּוֹם אֵף יִי.

they may all call upon the name of the Lord, [17] to serve Him shoulder to shoulder.

From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia they shall bring gifts to the gates of Zion for Me. On that day you shall not be ashamed of all your deeds, wherein you have transgressed [18] against Me, for I shall remove from you the arrogant and haughty ones and you shall be no more haughty on My holy mountain. I will leave in the midst of you a humble and a poor people, and they shall take refuge in the name of the Lord.

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity,

Nor speak lies,  
Neither shall a deceitful tongue [19]  
be found in their mouth.  
They shall feed and lie down,  
And none shall make them afraid.

#### ISRAEL REDEEMED

Sing, O daughter of Zion,  
Shout, O Israel;  
Be glad and rejoice with all your  
heart,  
Daughter of Jerusalem,  
The Lord has taken away your  
opponents.  
He has cast out your enemy;

☞ [17] THE NAME OF THE LORD: However high the Lord be above the world, let a man but enter a synagogue, stand behind a pillar and whisper a prayer, and the Holy One, blessed be He, hearkens to his prayer. Can there be a God nearer than this, who is as close to His creatures as the mouth is to the ear?

☞ [18] WHEREIN YOU HAVE TRANSGRESSED: A man does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of madness has entered into him.

☞ [19] A DECEITFUL TONGUE: Rabbi Abbahu said in the name of Rabbi Johanan: If a man seeks to praise God in an excessive way he is banished from the world. As it is written, "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord and show forth all His praise?" (Psalms 106:2).

רָנִי בֵּת צִיּוֹן, הָרִיעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, שִׂמְחִי וְעֲלִזִּי בְּכֹל לֵב בֵּת יְרוּשָׁלַּיִם.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in  
your midst.  
You shall not fear evil any  
more. [20]  
On that day it shall be said to  
Jerusalem:  
“Fear you not,  
Zion, let not your hands droop in  
despair.  
The Lord your God is in your  
midst,

A Mighty One who will save.  
He will rejoice over you [21] with  
gladness,  
He will be silent in His love,  
He will exult over you with sing-  
ing.”  
I shall gather together the grief-  
stricken, [22] who absented them-  
selves from the festivals,  
And those who have borne the  
burden of reproach.

🕉 [20] FEAR EVIL ANY MORE: Antoninus asked Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi when the *yetzer hara* begins to exert its influence on the human being; from the time of the embryo's formation, or when it emerges from the body? Rabbi Judah replied that the *yetzer hara* exercised its power from the time of the embryo's formation. Then Antoninus remarked, “In that case it should surely kick in the womb and come out of its own accord.”

🕉 [21] HE WILL REJOICE OVER YOU: Scripture says that the Lord repented that He had made man, and it grieved Him at His heart (Genesis 6:6). In explaining this, the Sages asked the man who had sought explanation about it, “Have you ever had a son born to you?” “Yes,” the man replied. “What did you do when he was born?” “I rejoiced and had others rejoice with me.” “But didn't you know that a time would come when your son would die?” “Surely,” the man said, “but in a time of joy, let there be joy, and in a time of mourning, mourning.” So, too, explained the rabbis, did it happen with the Lord and His creation of man.

🕉 [22] THE GRIEF-STRICKEN: A man in Sepphoris had a son who died, and Rabbi Jose ben Halafta went to visit him. While there, the man's

יָשִׁישׁ עָלָיו בְּשִׁמְחָה, יַחְרִישׁ בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ, יָגִיל עָלָיו בְּרִנָּה.

At that time, I will deal with all  
your oppressors,  
I will deliver the lame,  
And those that wandered away, I  
will gather.

At that time I will bring you in. [23]  
And at the time that I will gather  
you,  
I will make you renowned [24]  
Among all the peoples of the earth.

relative, an infidel, saw the Rabbi smile and asked him why he did so. Rabbi Jose said that he trusted the Lord to see that the father would see his son again in the world-to-come. Then the infidel said, “Can broken shards be made to cleave together again? Is it not written, ‘Thou shalt break them in pieces like a potter’s vessel’ ” (Psalms 2:9). Then Rabbi Jose replied, “Earthen vessels are made by water and perfected by fire. Vessels of glass are made by fire and perfected by fire. The former, when broken, cannot be repaired. But the latter, if broken, can be.” “How?” the infidel inquired. Rabbi Jose explained, “Because they are made by blowing. If the glass vessel blown by a mortal man can be repaired, how much more the being who is made by the breath of God.”

☞ [23] I WILL BRING YOU IN: *The Lord will bring Israel into its own land.*

☞ [24] I WILL MAKE YOU RENOWNED: Pieces of fine lumber were discarded on the muddy ground and no one paid attention to them. But a skilled cabinetmaker recognized their worth and wrought them into beautiful furniture. When the former owner saw what the cabinetmaker had done, he said, “I thought the wood worthless, yet what beautiful things you have made of it.”

So, too, Pharaoh and other tyrants have forced Israel to live in degradation and to occupy itself with menial work. But when they see the beauty and glory of Israel emancipated, they will regret what they have done and admire what Israel is.

כִּי אֶתֵּן אֶתְכֶם לְשֵׁם וּלְתִהְיֶה בְּכָל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ.



## 23. HAGGAI [1, 2]

### THE LORD'S REBUKE

IN THE SECOND YEAR of Darius the king,

[1] in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord through Haggai [2] the prophet to Zerubbabel, [3] the son of Shealtiel, governor

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[1] DARIUS THE KING: *He ruled Persia from 521–486 B.C.E., so that Haggai's appeal to the people was during the fall of 520.*

[2] HAGGAI: *The name probably derives from an abbreviation for haggigah, which means "the festival of the Lord."*

[3] ZERUBBABEL: *He was the grandson of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, who had been taken captive to Babylon, and was now the leader of the exiled Jews who returned from Babylon to the Holy Land.*

הָיָה דְּבַר יְיָ בְּיַד חֲגִי הַנְּבִיא אֶל זְרֻבָּבֶל בֶּן שְׁאֵלְתִּיאֵל.



of Judah, and to Joshua [4] the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying: Thus spoke the Lord of the host: "This people say: The time is not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house." Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses while this house lies waste? [5]

Thus said the Lord of hosts:

Consider how you have fared.

You have sown much and it brought little.

You eat but you cannot be sated.

You drink but you cannot get your fill.

You put on clothes but you are not warmed.

And he that earns wages has only a bag with a hole. [6]

You looked for much and it became little; and when you brought it home, I

blew upon it. Why? said the Lord of host. Because My house lies waste while you yourself run each to his own house. Therefore, because of you, the heavens kept back the dew, and the earth withheld her yield. I called for a drought upon the land [7] and upon the mountains, and upon the corn and wine, upon the oil and upon everything which the earth brings forth; and upon men and cattle, and upon all the labor of hands.

Thus said the Lord of the host: Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house; I will be pleased with it and I will be glorified, said the Lord.

#### THE PEOPLE RESPOND

THEN ZERUBBABEL, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the

☞ [4] JOSHUA: *The son of the high priest who had also been taken captive into Babylon.*

☞ [5] THIS HOUSE LIES WASTE: Greater is the study of Torah than rebuilding the Temple.

☞ [6] A BAG WITH A HOLE: Even in the time of His anger, the Lord remembers mercy.

☞ [7] DROUGHT UPON THE LAND: Rabbi Abba ben Abbin said in the name of Rabbi Aha: In the time of drought when men show mercy one to the other, God will be filled with mercy for them.

וְרַעְתֶּם הָרִבָּה וְהִבֵּא מִצֶּט, אֲכֹל וְאֵין לְשִׁבְעָה, שָׁתוּ וְאֵין לְשִׁכְרָה.

high priest, and all the rest of the people listened to the voice of the Lord and to the words of Haggai the prophet, as God had sent him. And the people began to fear because of the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke to the people with a message from the Lord: [8] "I am with you," said the lord.

And the Lord roused the spirit of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the high priest, and the spirit of all the rest of the people; and they came and began to work upon the house of the Lord of hosts. It was in the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, [9] in the second year of Darius the king.

On the twenty-first day in the seventh month the word of the Lord came through Haggai, saying: Now speak to

Zerubbabel and Joshua and to the rest of the people, saying, "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? [10] How do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in your eyes?" But now be strong, O Zerubbabel, said the Lord; and be strong, Joshua, and be strong all you people of the land, because I am with you. My spirit abides among you, also My covenant which I made with you when you came out of Egypt. Fear not. [11]

Thus said the Lord of the host: "Very soon I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the choicest of things of all nations shall come in and I will fill this house with splendor. Mine is all the silver. Mine is all the gold. The

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- 🌀 [8] A MESSAGE FROM THE LORD: Whoever causes the multitude to be righteous, through him is no sin brought about; but he who causes the multitude to sin will have no means to repent.
- 🌀 [9] THE TWENTY-FOURTH DAY OF THE SIXTH MONTH: *Only a little more than three weeks passed between the prophet's first appeal and beginning the work of restoring the Temple.*
- 🌀 [10] THIS HOUSE IN ITS FORMER GLORY: *The First Temple was destroyed in 586, so that 66 years had passed since then.*
- 🌀 [11] FEAR NOT: A farmer had two cows, a weak one and a strong one. On which one did he put the yoke? Upon the strong. In the same way does the Lord test the righteous.

וּמִלֵּאתִי אֶת הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה כְּבוֹד, לִי הַכֶּסֶף וְלִי הַזָּהָב.

future glory of this house shall be greater than that of the former," says the Lord.  
"And in this place I will give peace."

#### THE UNCLEAN SACRIFICES

IN THE TWENTY-FOURTH DAY of the ninth month in the second year of Darius came the word of the Lord through Haggai the prophet, saying: Thus said the Lord: Ask the priests for a decision. If one carries hallowed flesh in the skirt of a garment and with that skirt touches bread or pottage or wine or oil, or any kind of food, will it become holy? And the priests answered and said: No.

Then Haggai said: If one who is unclean because he touched a dead body touches any of these things, will it become unclean? And the priests answered and said: It shall be unclean.

Then Haggai answered, saying: So is this people before Me, said the Lord. And so is all the work of their hands and all that they offer here is unclean.

Now I pray you, consider it: Before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord, see how you fared. When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to

the wine vat to draw out fifty press-measures, there were but twenty. But from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, the day that the foundations of the Lord's temple were laid, consider it. Is there seed in the barn? Yes. [Thus,] the vine and the fig-tree, the pomegranate and the olive-tree, have not yet brought forth [any fruit], yet from this day I will bless you. [12]

#### FALL OF THE PAGAN KINGDOMS

AND THE WORD OF THE LORD came a second time to Haggai in the twenty-fourth day of the same month: Tell Zerubbabel, governor of Judah: I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the thrones of the kingdoms; and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, each one by the sword of his brother. On that day, says the Lord of the host, I will take you, Zerubbabel, My servant, the son of Shealtiel, and I will make you as a signet. For I have chosen you, says the Lord of the host.

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❧ [12] I WILL BLESS YOU: Rabbi Johanan said that anyone can enter the Jerusalem of this world, but only those who are ordained can enter the Jerusalem of the world-to-come.

גְּדוֹלַת יְהוָה כְּבוֹד הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן הָרִאשׁוֹן אָמַר יי, וּבִמְקוֹם הַזֶּה אֶתֵּן שְׁלוֹם.



## 24. ZECHARIAH [I-I4]

IN THE EIGHTH MONTH in the second year of Darius [1] the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, [2] son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying:

Return to Me and I will return to you, [3] said the Lord of the host. Be not

like your fathers. The former prophets cried to them saying, Thus said the Lord: Turn away from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.

But they did not listen, nor did they give heed. Your fathers, where are

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[1] DARIUS: *The second year of Darius' reign was 520 B.C.E. Zechariah's mission began, then, only two months after Haggai's.*

[2] ZECHARIAH: *He probably came from both a prophetic and priestly family.*

[3] I WILL RETURN TO YOU: *To have the presence of God, the Shechinah, dwelling among them, the children of Israel would have to return to law and righteousness.*

שובו אלי ואשוב אליכם, אמר יי צבאות.

they? [4] And the prophets, do they live forever? [5] But My words and decrees which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? [6] So they turned and said: As the Lord of hosts determined to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds, so has He done to us.

#### THE VISION OF HEAVENLY RIDERS

IN THE TWENTY-FOURTH DAY of the eleventh month, which is Shevat, [7] in the second year of Darius, I saw in the night

a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle-trees in the bottom of the valley and behind him men on red, sorrel and white horses.

Then I said: "O Lord, what are they?" The man who stood among the myrtle-trees said: "They are those whom the Lord has sent to and fro through the earth." And the riders said to the angel of the Lord who stood among the myrtle-trees: "We have been going to and fro through the earth, and the whole earth is quiet and at peace." [8] Then the angel of the Lord cried out, saying: "O Lord

❧ [4] WHERE ARE THEY: *The preaching of the prophets came to pass. The former generations were punished by being taken into captivity and by the destruction of Jerusalem.*

❧ [5] DO THEY LIVE FOREVER: When a human being comes into the world his fists are clenched as if he were proclaiming, "Everything is mine to grasp." When he departs from the world, his hands are open as if to declare, "I can take nothing with me from the world."

❧ [6] OVERTAKE YOUR FATHERS: Would that life were a shadow cast by a wall or tree instead of like the shadow cast by a bird in flight.

❧ [7] SHEVAT: *The Babylonian name for February-March was Shevat and it was the term used by the Israelites who had so recently left Babylon. The date was 519 B.C.E.*

❧ [8] QUIET AND AT PEACE: *Other nations are at peace; only Israel is persecuted.*

הַתְּהִלָּנוּ בָּאָרֶץ, וְהָיָה כָּל הָאָרֶץ יוֹשֶׁבֶת וְשׁוֹקֵטָה.

of the host, how long will You have no compassion on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah with which You have been angry for seventy years?" [9]

Then the Lord answered the angel who spoke with me, with good words, comforting words, so the angel said to me: "Thus spoke the Lord of the host: I am deeply moved by Jerusalem and Zion, and I am very angry with the nations that are now quiet and at ease. I was a little angry and they used it to further disaster. [10] Therefore, said the Lord, I will return to Jerusalem with mercy. [11] My house shall be built in it and a build-

er's line shall be stretched over Jerusalem." [12]

Again proclaim: Thus said the Lord of the host, "My cities shall again overflow with prosperity; and the Lord shall once more comfort Zion and once again choose Jerusalem."

#### THE VISION OF FOUR HORNS

I LIFTED UP MY EYES and saw, and behold, [there were] four horns. I said to the angel that spoke to me: "What are these?" And he said to me: "These are the four horns [13] which have scattered Judah,

❧ [9] FOR SEVENTY YEARS: *This is a round number which covers the time during which the Temple lay in ruins, from 587 to 519 B.C.E. The time was, in fact, 67 years.*

❧ [10] TO FURTHER DISASTER: According to the nature of man, a prosecutor does not also become the defender. But God called Israel "a nation heavy with sin," and He also said of them, "And Thy people are all righteous."

❧ [11] JERUSALEM WITH MERCY: Rabbi Abin said, "It is written, 'And you shall be unto me (*lamed yod*) a peculiar treasure' (Exodus 19:5). The *lamed* is the highest letter; the *yod* the lowest. Is it not right for the smallest to cleave to the greatest!"

❧ [12] JERUSALEM: *The builder's line indicates that the city will be rebuilt.*

❧ [13] THE FOUR HORNS: *The four horns stand both for the four quarters of the*

וְנָחָם יְיָ עוֹד אֶת צִיּוֹן, וּבָחַר עוֹד בִּירוּשָׁלָּיִם.

Israel and Jerusalem so that not a man could walk upright.”

Then the Lord showed me four blacksmiths, [14] and I said, “What have they come to do?” And the angel spoke to me, saying: “They came to terrify, to cast down the horns of the nations which lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to destroy it.” [15]

#### THE VISION OF THE SURVEYOR

I LIFTED UP MY EYES and saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then I said: “Where are you going?” And he said to me: “To measure Jerusalem, to see what her length and breadth should

be.” As the angel spoke to me and was departing, another angel went out to meet him, and he said to him: “Run and speak to this young man and say to him: Jerusalem will be inhabited and be a city without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. For I, said the Lord, will be a wall of fire round about her; and I will be a glory in her midst.”

Thus said the Lord of the host regarding the nations who plundered you: Surely, he who touches you, touches the apple of his eye. I will wave My hand against them and they shall be despoiled by their victims.

Sing and rejoice, [16] O daughter of Zion, for I am coming to dwell in your

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*heavens and for the four kingdoms which have afflicted Israel—Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.*

☞ [14] FOUR BLACKSMITHS: The four blacksmiths are the artisans who will rebuild the Temple; they are the Messiah the son of David, the Messiah the son of Joseph, the prophet Elijah and the righteous priest Melchizedek.

☞ [15] TO DESTROY IT: A man came to Raba saying, “The ruler of the city in which I live has commanded me to kill a certain man. If I refuse, he will kill me. What shall I do?” Raba replied, “Be killed and do not kill.” But if someone comes intending to kill you, be first and kill him.

☞ [16] SING AND REJOICE: *Levi* means cleaving, and all those who heard the Levites singing at once cleaved to the Lord.

כִּי הִנֹּגַע בָּכֶם נוֹגַע בְּבֵת עֵינֹ; כִּי הִנֵּי מִנִּיף אֶת יָדֵי עַלֵיהֶם וְהָיוּ שָׁלֵל  
לְעַבְדֵיהֶם.

midst, said the Lord. And many nations shall attach themselves to the Lord on that day and shall be My people. And the Lord shall take Judah for His own possession in the holy land and shall choose Jerusalem again. [17] Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling place.

#### THE VISION OF JOSHUA'S VINDICATION

HE SHOWED ME JOSHUA, the chief priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the angel of the Lord said to him: "The Lord rebukes you, O Satan. [18] Yes, the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you. Is this man not a brand plucked out of the fire?" [19]

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel. And [the angel] spoke to those who stood before him, saying: "Take the filthy garments off him."

To Joshua, he said: "See, I have removed the guilt from you and will dress you in clean garments."

Then I said; "Let them put a clean turban on his head." They put a clean turban on his head and dressed him in [fresh] garments, and the angel of the Lord stood by. And the angel of the Lord forewarned Joshua, saying: "Thus said the Lord: If you walk in My ways and keep My commandments, then you shall also judge My house and have charge of My courts, and I will give you free access [20] among those who stand there."

🌀 [17] CHOOSE JERUSALEM AGAIN: Only when you conduct yourselves like the children of God shall you be called His children.

🌀 [18] O SATAN: *Here Satan is the celestial prosecutor of the Lord, not the adversary or tempter, as he appears in later literature.*

🌀 [19] PLUCKED OUT OF THE FIRE: *Israel is the wick, the Torah is the oil, and the Shechinah is the light.*

🌀 [20] FREE ACCESS: Rabbi Judah said, "The children of Israel will not be delivered unless they repent, and they repent only through tribulations, oppression, exile and the lack of a livelihood."

הם כל בשר מפני יי, כי יעזר ממצון קדשו.



## THE VISION OF THE CANDELABRUM

THE ANGEL who spoke to me aroused me [and I was] like a man awakened from sleep. He said to me: "What do you see?" And I said: "I see a candelabrum [21] all gold with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps are on it. There are seven pipes to the lamps which are on top. And there are two olive-trees beside the candlestick, one on the right side of the bowl and one on the left."

I said to the angel; "What are these, my Lord?" The angel answered and said to me: "Do you not know what these are?" I said: "No, my Lord." Then he answered and said to me: "Those seven lamps are the eyes of the Lord that are roving over the whole earth." Then I said to him: "What are those two olive-trees upon the right of the candelabrum and upon the left of it?" And he said:

"Those are the anointed ones, who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

And the angel said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by arms, nor by might, but by My spirit, said the Lord of the host. [22] Who are you, O great mountain before Zerubbabel! You shall become a plain and he shall bring out the top stone with shouts of: How beautiful it is!"

The word of the Lord came to me, saying: The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house and his hands shall also finish it. [23] And you shall know that the Lord of the host has sent me to you. He who has despised the day of small things shall yet rejoice to see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel.

## THE VISION OF THE FLYING SCROLL

THEN AGAIN I lifted up my eyes and saw a flying scroll. He said to me: "What

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☞ [21] A CANDELABRUM: *The candelabrum symbolizes the restoration of the Jewish state.*

☞ [22] LORD OF THE HOST: Let others rely on the arm of flesh; Israel's weapon is prayer.

☞ [23] FINISH IT: Iron, the metal of weapons and warfare, cannot build an altar to the God of life and of peace.

לֹא בְחֵיל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ כִּי אִם בְּרוּחִי, אָמַר יְיָ צְבָאוֹת.

do you see?" I said: "I see a flying scroll, [24] its length twenty cubits and its width ten cubits." And he said to me: "This is the curse that goes forth over the face of the whole land. For how long have all thieves remained unpunished? For how long have all those who swear falsely gone unpunished? So I sent forth [this curse], said the Lord of the host, and it shall enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by My name. [25] It shall make its abode in the midst of his house and destroy him and the timber and the stones."

#### THE VISION OF THE WOMAN

THE ANGEL who spoke to me came forward and said: "Lift up your eyes and

see what this is that goes forth." I said: "What is it?" And he said: "This measure that goes forth contains the iniquity of all the land." [Then I saw] the lead cover lifted and there was a woman sitting in the measure. The angel pushed her down in the measure and closed the leaden cover over the opening, and said: "This is wickedness." [26]

Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and there were two women [27] and they had wings like the stork, and the wind was in their wings. They lifted up the measure between the earth and the sky.

I said to the angel who talked to me: "Where are they taking the measure?" And he said to me: "To the land of Shinar [28] where they will build her a

🌀 [24] FLYING SCROLL: *The flying scroll has inscribed on its parchment curses against the evils of mankind. It destroys the wicked.*

🌀 [25] WHO SWEARS FALSELY BY MY NAME: *Do no good to the evil man and no evil will befall you.*

🌀 [26] THIS IS WICKEDNESS: *The woman symbolizes evil, and is therefore confined by the leaden cover.*

🌀 [27] TWO WOMEN: *The two women are symbolic of hypocrisy and pride which, with evil, settle in Babylon.*

🌀 [28] SHINAR: *Shinar is the ancient name for Babylon, looked on as the land of iniquity.*

וְהָיָה שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים יוֹצְאוֹת רוּחַ בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם, וְלָהֶנָּה כְּנָפִים כְּנָפֵי הַחֲסִידָה.

house, and when it is ready, they will set her down in her own place.”

#### THE VISION OF FOUR CHARIOTS

AGAIN I lifted up my eyes and I saw four chariots come out from between the two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot there were red horses, in the second chariot black horses, in the third chariot white horses, and in the fourth chariot spotted horses. I said to the angel that spoke with me: “What are these, my Lord?” The angel answered me, saying: “These chariots, the four winds of heaven, go forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth. The black horses go to the northland, the white horses, behind them, to the west, the spotted horses toward the south, and the red horses to the east.” [They were straining to go] and he said: “Go and traverse the earth.” Then he cried out to me, saying: “Look at those going to the northland. They

have set My spirit at rest in the north country.”

#### ZERUBBABEL AND JOSHUA CROWNED

THE WORD OF THE LORD came to me, saying: Take the gold and the silver brought by Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, the exiles who have arrived from Babylon, and go on the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and the gold and make two crowns. [29] Set one crown on the head of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the other crown put on the head of Joshua the high priest, And you shall speak to Zerubbabel, saying: “Thus said the Lord of the host: Here is a man whose name is the Branch; [30] and he will branch forth from his place and shall rebuild the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory, and he shall sit and reign upon his throne. Joshua shall be at his right hand and there shall be peaceful counsel [31] between them.

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- ☞ [29] MAKE TWO CROWNS: The years of the man who runs after leadership are shortened.
  - ☞ [30] BRANCH: *This refers to Zerubbabel for whom Haggai had already forecast a great, almost messianic, role in reviving Jewish life.*
  - ☞ [31] PEACEFUL COUNSEL: When two people quarrel, the one who keeps silence first is the more praiseworthy.

אֵלֶּה אַרְבַּע רוּחוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת מִהֶתִּיב עַל אֲדוֹן כָּל הָאָרֶץ.

And the crowns shall be [put] as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. And those who are far off shall come and rebuild the temple of the Lord, and you shall know that the Lord of the host has sent me to you. It shall come to pass, if you diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord God.

#### FASTING AND MOURNING

IT CAME TO PASS in the fourth year [32] of King Darius, in the fourth day in the ninth month of Kislev, the people of Beth-el sent Sarezzer, Regemelech and his men to present offerings to the Lord and to speak to the priests of the house of the Lord, and to the prophets, saying: "Are we to mourn and fast in the fifth month as we have been doing these many years?"

And the word of the Lord of hosts came to Zechariah, saying: Speak to all the people of the land and to the priests, saying: When you fasted and mourned

in the fifth and in the seventh month these seventy years, did I command you to fast? Was it for Me that you did fast? When you eat and drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?" [33] Are not these the words which the Lord proclaimed through His former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and at peace, and her town round about her, and the negev and the lowlands were inhabited? The word of the Lord of the host was: Render true judgment and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother. Oppress not the widow, nor the orphan, nor the stranger, [34] nor the poor. Let none of you devise evil in your heart against your neighbor, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, says the Lord.

Thus said the Lord of the host: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, of the seventh and the tenth shall become to the house of Judah a joy and a cheerful season. Therefore, love truth and peace.

☞ [32] THE FOURTH YEAR: *The year 518 B.C. E.*

☞ [33] DRINK FOR YOURSELVES: Food and drink may be abundant, but if there is no peace they are as if they were nothing.

☞ [34] NOR THE STRANGER: The heathen is your neighbor and your brother; to do him wrong is a sin.

צֹם הָרְבִיעִי וְצֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית יְהוּדָה  
לְשִׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמוֹעֲדִים טוֹבִים.

## THE PEACEFUL PROMISE

THE WORD OF THE LORD of the host came, saying: I am greatly concerned about Zion; and I am concerned about her with great fury.

Thus said the Lord: I will return to Zion and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called "The City of Truth," and the mountain of the Lord of the host shall be called "The Holy Mountain."

Thus said the Lord of the host: There shall yet sit again old men and old women in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand, because of his great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing. [35]

Thus said the Lord of the host: I will deliver My people from the east country and from the west country. I will gather them in and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people and I will be their God in truth and in righteousness.

## THE LORD'S PEOPLE

THUS SAID THE LORD of the host: It shall come to pass that there shall come people, inhabitants of many cities. The people of one city shall go to another, saying: "Let us go at once to seek the Lord of the host and entreat His favor." "Yes, we will also go," [they answered]. Many peoples and mighty nations shall come to seek the Lord of the host in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord.

Thus said the Lord of the host: In those days it shall come to pass that ten men from nations of different tongues shall take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, "We will go with you because we have heard that God is with your people."

## THE KINGDOM OF THE MESSIAH

Rejoice greatly, [36] O daughter of Zion,

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🔥 [35] BOYS AND GIRLS PLAYING: Rabbi Nathan said, "The vision is for the time appointed. It hastens to the end and does not deceive. If it delay, wait for it confidently, for it will surely come and will not delay indefinitely."

🔥 [36] REJOICE GREATLY: The spirit of the Lord rests not upon the sad and the forlorn, but upon those who do their duty and are glad.

וְהִחְיוּ בְּכִנּוּף אִישׁ יְהוּדִי לְאָמֵר: גִּלְכָּה עִמָּכֶם, כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם.

Shout joyfully, O daughter of  
Jerusalem.

Behold, your King comes to you,  
He is just and filled with salvation,  
Lowly, and riding upon an ass,  
Or upon a colt, the foal of an ass.  
And he will destroy the chariots of  
Ephraim,  
And the horses from Jerusalem.  
The battle bow shall be destroyed.  
And he shall proclaim peace to the  
nations; [37]  
And his dominion shall be from sea  
to sea,  
From the Euphrates to the end of  
the earth.

#### JERUSALEM DELIVERED

Behold, a day of the Lord is com-  
ing, [38]  
When I will gather all nations against  
Jerusalem to battle;  
The city shall be taken, and the  
houses plundered,  
And the women violated;

And half the city shall go into exile,  
But the rest of the people shall not  
be cut off from the city.  
Then the Lord shall go forth,  
And fight against those nations,  
As once He fought in the day of  
battle.  
In that day His feet shall stand on  
the Mount of Olives,  
And the Mount of Olives shall be  
split in two,  
Toward the east and toward the  
west,  
So that there shall be a great valley.  
You shall flee to the valley of the  
mountain;  
You shall flee as you fled from be-  
fore the earthquake  
In the days of Uzziah, king of Judah;  
And the Lord, your God, with all  
the holy ones  
Will come to your help.  
It shall come to pass on that day  
there shall be neither heat, nor  
cold, nor frost;

🕎 [37] PROCLAIM PEACE TO THE NATIONS: Rab said, "The time of the Messiah is not like this time. In the messianic age there will be no eating and drinking, no begetting of children, no commerce, no jealousy, no hatred and no strife."

🕎 [38] A DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING: In this day of God's judgment Jerusalem will be delivered.

גִּילִי מְאֹד בַּת צִיּוֹן, הָרִיעִי בֵּת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, הִנֵּה מֶלֶכְךָ יָבוֹא לָךְ, צַדִּיק וְנוֹשָׁע  
הוא, עָנִי וְרוֹכֵב עַל חֲמֹר.

It shall be one continuous day  
 Which shall be known as the Lord's,  
 Not day and not night;  
 But at evening time there will be  
 light.  
 And it shall come to pass in that day,  
 The living waters shall go out from  
 Jerusalem,  
 Half of them toward the eastern sea,  
 And half of them toward the west-  
 ern sea,  
 Flowing on through summer and  
 winter.  
The Lord shall be King over all the  
earth,  
In that day the Lord shall be One  
and His name One.

## JERUSALEM THE ONE AND ONLY

IT SHALL COME TO PASS that everyone that is left of all the nations that went up against Jerusalem, shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of the host, and celebrate the feast of tabernacles. On that day shall be [inscribed] on the bells of the horses: "Holy to the Lord." The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the sacrificial bowls before the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holy to the Lord of hosts. All those who sacrifice shall come and take them to boil flesh in them. On that day there shall be no more traffickers in the house of the Lord of the host.

וְהָיָה יְיָ לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִיָּה יְיָ אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד.



## 25. MALACHI [1-3]

### THE PROMISE

THE PROPHECY of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. [1]

I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you ask, "In what way have You loved us?"

Says the Lord: Was not Esau Jacob's

[older] brother? Yet I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau. [2] I made his mountains a desolation and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness.

Edom may say: "We are impoverished, but we will return and rebuild the desolate places." Thus says the Lord of the host: They shall build, but I will

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[1] MALACHI: *This means "my messenger," and is probably a description of the prophet's mission, rather than his name. Tradition ascribed the book's authorship to Ezra the Scribe.*

[2] I REJECTED ESAU: The Lord gave Israel three precious gifts, all through suffering: the Torah, the land of Israel, and the world-to-come.

אֶהְבֶּתִּי אֶתְכֶם, אָמַר יי', וְאַמַּרְתֶּם: בַּמָּה אֶהְבֶּתֵנוּ?



throw it down. They shall be called the reign of wickedness and a people against whom the Lord is angry for ever. Your eyes shall see it and you shall say: "The Lord is great beyond the borders of Israel." [3]

#### THE PRIESTS REBUKED

A son honors his father,  
And a servant his master; [4]  
If, then, I be a father,  
Where is the honor to Me?  
And if I am a master,  
Where is the fear of Me?  
 Says the Lord of the host

To you priests who despise My name.

You ask: "How have we despised Your name?"

You bring to My table defiled bread.

You ask: "In what way have we defiled it?"

In that you say, "The table of the Lord is something to be despised."

When you offer the blind for sacrifice, [5] [you think] it is no evil.

And when you offer the lame and sick, [you think] it is no evil.

Present it to your governor;

Will he be pleased with it?

☞ [3] BEYOND THE BORDERS OF ISRAEL: An unbeliever said to Rabbi Gamaliel that the rabbis had said that wherever ten people assembled to pray, the spirit of the Lord was among them. "How many *Shechinahs* are there?" he asked. Rabbi Gamaliel then called the unbeliever's servant and struck him. "Why did you strike him?" the unbeliever asked. "Because the sun is in the house of an infidel." "But the sun shines everywhere in the world!" the unbeliever protested. Then Rabbi Gamaliel said, "If the sun can be everywhere, and the sun is only one of God's many servants, how much more can the spirit of the Lord shine through the whole universe."

☞ [4] A SERVANT HIS MASTER: A son honors his father and a servant his master, but you, Israel, are ashamed to declare that I am your Father, or that you are My servant, says the Lord.

☞ [5] THE BLIND FOR SACRIFICE: One of the blemishes that made an animal unfit for sacrifice.

בֶּן יֶכֶד אָב וְעֶבֶד אֲדֹנָיו, וְאִם אָב אָנִי – אֵיךְ כְּבוֹדִי, וְאִם אֲדֹנִים אָנִי – אֵיךְ מוֹרְאִי?

Or will he receive you kindly?  
 O that there were one among you  
 that would shut the doors  
 [of the Temple],  
 So that you might not kindle fire on  
 My altar in vain. [6]  
 I take no delight in you, says the  
 Lord of the host,  
 Neither will I accept an offering  
 from your hand.  
 Because from the rising of the sun  
 to its going down,  
 My name is great among nations.  
 And in every place offerings are  
 presented in My name,  
 Pure offerings.

#### WARNING TO THE PRIESTS

NOW THIS ADMONITION is for you, O

priests. If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name, says the Lord of the host, then I will send a curse upon you. I will curse your blessings. Yes, I will curse them, because you do not take it to your heart.

The lips of the priest should keep knowledge, and the Law is what people should seek from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. [7] But you turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble in the Law. You have perverted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of the host. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and degraded before all the people, according as you have not kept My way but have shown partiality in the Law. [8]

❧ [6] ON MY ALTAR IN VAIN: *Offerings presented in such a spirit were without value. Better not to sacrifice altogether and to let the altar fire die.*

❧ [7] LORD OF HOSTS: He in whom the fear of sin comes before wisdom, his wisdom shall endure. But he in whom wisdom comes before the fear of sin, his wisdom shall not endure. He whose works exceed his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. But he whose wisdom exceeds his works, his wisdom shall not endure.

❧ [8] PARTIALITY IN THE LAW: Old men, eunuchs and childless men should not be appointed as judges, so that justice may be tempered with mercy. And Rabbi Judah added, neither should the hard-hearted be appointed.

כִּי שִׁפְתֵי כֹהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ דִּעְתָּ וְתוֹרָה יִבְקְשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ, כִּי מִלֶּאֱדָר יִי צָבָאוֹת הוּא.

## WITHHOLDING TITHES

FROM THE DAYS of your fathers, you have turned aside from My ordinances, and have not kept them. Return to Me and I will return to you, says the Lord of the host. But you say, "How shall we return?" Can a man rob God? [9] Yet you did rob Me. You say, "How have we robbed you?" In tithes and heave-offerings. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in My house, and see what I will do, says the Lord of hosts. See if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing for you until there will be no more want. I will rebuke the devourer [10] of your good, and he shall

not destroy the produce of the land. Neither shall your vine cast its fruit before time in the field. All nations shall call you blessed, for you shall be a land of delight.

## DIVORCE AND INTERMARRIAGE

Have we not one father? [11]

Has not one God created us?

Why do we deal treacherously  
every man against his brother,

Profaning the covenant of our  
fathers?

Judah has dealt treacherously; and an abomination is committed in Israel and Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the holy seed which the Lord loves, and

❧ [9] CAN A MAN ROB GOD: He who preoccupies himself with the Law for its own sake protects the whole world and brings redemption closer.

❧ [10] THE DEVOURER: *The locust is the devourer and the land had just suffered a plague of locusts.*

❧ [11] HAVE WE NOT ONE FATHER: "All flesh shall come to worship before me," Isaiah says (66:23). It does not say, "All Israel shall come," but "All flesh shall come." Rabbi Phinehas said, "Everyone who weakens his *yetzer* in this world is worthy to see the face of the *Shechinah*." All flesh means the heathen, but not all the heathen; only those who have not enslaved Israel, will be received by the Messiah.

הָלוֹא אָב אֶחָד לְכָלֵנוּ, הָלוֹא אֵל אֶחָד בְּרָאֵנוּ – מִדּוּעַ נִבְגַּד אִישׁ בְּאֶחָיו?

married the daughter of a strange god. [12] The Lord will cut off a son and a grandson from the tents of Israel for the man who does this and who offers offerings to the Lord of the host.

And this is the second thing you do; you who cover the altar of the Lord with tears, weeping and groaning. Because of

it, I cannot accept your offering, nor receive with good will anything from your hand.

And yet you say: "For what reason?" Because the Lord Himself has borne witness between you and the wife of your youth, [13] against whom you dealt treacherously, though she is your com-

🔔 [12] A STRANGE GOD: Once when Rabbi Akiba was in Rome, a certain Roman sent two beautiful women to him, bathed and anointed and dressed like brides. All night they attempted to seduce him but he would not turn to them. In the morning they returned to their master and complained that they would rather die than be given to Akiba. Their master sent for Akiba and asked him why he had not done with these women as men generally do with women. They were beautiful, weren't they? They were human beings just as he was, weren't they? Had not the Lord who created Akiba also created them? And Akiba replied, "I could not help myself. I was overcome by their breath because of the forbidden meats they ate."

🔔 [13] THE WIFE OF YOUR YOUTH: A Roman woman asked a rabbi how long it took the Lord to create the universe, and was told, six days. She then asked what the Lord had been doing since, and the rabbi said, "The Lord has been arranging marriages." The lady replied that if that was all He was doing, she too could do it, and since she had many male and female slaves, she would pair them off. The rabbi warned her that it might seem simple, but that it was as difficult as dividing the Red Sea.

The lady then called together a thousand of her male slaves and a thousand of her female slaves and in a single night arranged marriages for all of them. The next day they all appeared before her, one with a fractured skull, another with an eye knocked out, still another with a

עַל כִּי יְיָ הָעֵיד בֵּינָךְ וּבֵין אִשְׁתְּךָ נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּגְדָתָהּ בָּהּ . . .

panion and the wife of your covenant.  
No one who has [a trace of] spirit has  
done this. What does this one seek? The  
 seed of God. Therefore, take heed to  
 yourself and let none deal treacherously  
 against the wife of his youth. Said the  
 Lord God of Israel, I hate putting away  
 the first wife [14] and he who covers  
 his garment with violence. [15] Take

heed that you deal not treacherously.

#### JUDGMENT AND LAW

YOU HAVE WEARIED THE LORD with your  
 words. In that you say: "Every one  
 that does evil is good in the sight of the  
 Lord, and He delights in them. Or where  
 is the God of justice?" [16]

---

broken leg. Angrily she asked what was the matter and heard a chorus  
 of "I don't want him" and "I don't want her".

The lady then sent for the rabbi and said, "There is no God like your  
 God and your Torah is true, for what you told me about making mar-  
 riages is quite correct."

☞ [14] I HATE PUTTING AWAY THE FIRST WIFE: Whenever a man divorces  
 his first wife, even the altar sheds tears in her behalf.

A bad wife is like leprosy to her husband. What is the remedy? Let  
 him divorce her and be cured of his leprosy.

☞ [15] COVERS HIS GARMENT WITH VIOLENCE: *This expression signified  
 divorce because, according to ancient custom, a woman was claimed as a wife  
 by spreading one's garment over her.*

☞ [16] THE GOD OF JUSTICE: God said to David, "If you see that I do good  
 to the wicked, let it not seem evil in your heart, but go on doing good.  
 If to the evil ones who provoke Me and do not profit Me, I do good,  
 how much more shall I do good to you who trust in Me, and occupy  
 yourself with the Law?" Rabbi Elazar said, "From the prosperity of  
 the wicked in this world, you can judge the reward of the righteous in  
 the world-to-come. If the wicked are treated so, think how much more  
 will the righteous merit."

... וְהָיָא חֲבֵרְתָּךְ וְאִשֶּׁת בְּרִיתְךָ. וְלֹא אָחָד עָשָׂה וּשְׂאָר רֵוַח לוֹ.

Behold, I will send My messenger, [17] and he shall clear the way before Me. The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he comes. And he shall sit as a refiner and a purifier, and he shall purify the sons of Levi [18] and refine them as one refines gold and silver. [19] And then they shall be worthy to bring to the Lord offerings of righteousness. Then also the offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant to the Lord as in the days of old and as in the years gone by.

I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, and against all who swear falsely; and against

those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the orphan; and against those who turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear Me not. I, the Lord, do not change, and you, the sons of Jacob, will not be destroyed.

#### THOSE WHO REVERE HIS NAME

YOUR WORDS have been harsh against Me, says the Lord. You say, "How have we spoken against You?" You have said: "It is useless to serve God. What gain is it to do His bidding and that we walked humbly before the Lord of the host? How the arrogant are happy and those who do wickedness have been elevated. Yes, they tempt God and escape." [20] Then those who feared the

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🔥 [17] MY MESSENGER: *The Hebrew word for my messenger is malachi. Some commentators believe the messenger refers to Elijah, who will prepare the way for the Day of Judgment.*

🔥 [18] THE SONS OF LEVI: *First the priests will be purified, then the rest of the people.*

🔥 [19] GOLD AND SILVER: *The people will be refined as precious metal is refined.*

🔥 [20] THEY TEMPT GOD AND ESCAPE: *Every sin of a man is engraved upon his bones.*

הַנְּבִי שׁוֹלֵחַ מִלְאָכָי וּפְנֵה דֶרֶךְ לְפָנָי.

Lord spoke with one another. The Lord gave heed and listened, and there was written in a book of remembrance that was before Him concerning those who revered the Lord and honored His name.

They shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, a special treasure in the day I begin to judge. And I will have compassion upon them, just as a man has compassion upon his own son who works with him. Then you shall distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, [21] between him that serves God and between him that does not serve Him.

#### THE LORD'S DAY

Behold the day comes,  
It burns like a furnace;  
And all the arrogant,  
Everyone who does wickedness

Shall be stubble;  
And the day that is coming,  
Says the Lord of the host,  
Shall set them ablaze  
And will leave  
Neither root nor branch of them.  
But to you that revere My name,  
The sun of righteousness  
Shall arise with healing in its wing.  
You shall go forth,  
And skip like fattened calves.  
You shall tread down the wicked,  
For they shall be ashes under your  
feet  
In the day I begin to act.  
Remember the law of Moses, My  
servant, which I commanded  
to him in Horeb for all Israel,  
statutes and ordinances.  
Behold, I will send you  
Elijah the prophet [22]

☞ [21] THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED: If a man comes to defile himself, the door is open to him; but if he comes to purify himself, then he is helped. In the school of Rabbi Ishmael it was taught: It is as when a man sells naphtha and balm. When a buyer for naphtha comes, the shop owner says, Measure it out for yourself. But if a buyer comes for balm, the shop owner says, Wait and I shall help you measure it so that we may both be perfumed.

☞ [22] ELIJAH THE PROPHET: *The prophet Elijah will come as the Lord's messenger, to prepare men for the coming Day of the Lord.*

וַיִּקְשֹׁב יְיָ וַיִּשְׁמַע, וַיִּכְתֹּב סֵפֶר זְכוֹנוֹ לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי יְיָ וּלְחוֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ.

Before the coming  
Of the great and terrible day of the  
Lord,  
And he shall turn the heart

of the fathers  
To the children,  
And the heart of the children  
To their fathers. [23]

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☞ [23] CHILDREN TO THEIR FATHERS: *Elijah will bring harmony to family life, reconcile the conflicts between husband and wife, between parents and children, so that family life will be restored to its virtue and meaning.*

A father's love is for his children, and the children's love for their children.

HAZAK, HAZAK, V'NIT-HAZEK.

וְהָשִׁיב לֵב אָבוֹת עַל בְּנִים וְלֵב בְּנִים עַל אָבוֹתָם.



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